SUNWISE TURN

A HUMAN COMEDY OF BOOKSELLING

MADGE JENISON

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A Human Comedy of Bookselling

BY

MADGE JENISON

Think always ceaselessly. This is the only duty—the only happiness—never to cease from ploughing through an idea.

—RAHEL VARNHAGEN.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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First Printing . . April, 1923
Second Printing . . Aug., 1923
Third Printing . . Dec., 1923

Printed in the United States of America

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO

Mr. Clive Bell

WHO, THOUGH I HAVE NEVER SEEN HIM

AND HE HAS NEVER HEARD MY NAME,

FOUNDED THIS BOOKSHOP

BECAUSE HE WROTE A BOOK

SUNWISE TURN

CHAPTER I

THIS is the Olympiad of a beautiful and adventurous and anxious experience. It is not a lesson, nor an essay on a theory, nor a sweet bun of a story you can buy for a penny. It is the way we did something that we thought and felt and that was full of meaning for us; and it was so hard to do and so interesting that I doubt if a razor's edge more of work or interest could be put into four years than went into those four for us through it

It was a very cold January Sunday—one of those brilliant January mornings when the air and light seem to be fused into one in some terrible bright unity. The sunshine lay like a block on the floor, and the air when you opened the window entered the room in an instant and filled it with cold, strong as a taste in your mouth. The room was very warm and bright, and there were flowers in it which I kept smelling. I was reading a book luxuriously in a long pillowed chair and I was thinking vaguely between its rustling pages of two women I knew who

needed something to do. They needed some way to use all the powers and perceptions which leisure-class women draw upon and make into pleasure, but never into life. Then I forgot all about them and began to sink out of sight. And after a time it flooded over me suddenly, as if I had never thought of it before, how great books are—that they are not dead things as people think—they transport one, and there are few of us indeed who are not living out of some line of Marcus Aurelius, or II Kings, or the Sermon on the Mount, or George Eliot, or Nietzsche. I was up town then and going back and forth on the subway, and I thought of the advertisements of books sometimes with a kind of agony—how all that passes so facilely from hand to hand is derived and sixth-rate, and the great books go only to a cult. I had a feeling at times as I looked at the billboards and the stalls in the subway stations that I must go somewhere and lie down and rest.

The room was very warm and still and awake. I sat staring at that shining golden block of light and smelling the stock and lilies on the end of the table with the odor of gingerbread and smelts beginning to penetrate agreeably into them. I began to think about Mr. Clive Bell's essay on art. I had often thought of it that winter. Mr. Arthur Davies had brought it back from England in the fall, and we had passed it around among us and loaned it and

talked about it up to midnight. Then I began to think about my relatives. One of them had come to see me the afternoon before. When we had set our teacups on the floor beside us, we began to talk about books. We talked about books because they were to both of us if not the house and garden, at least the horizon of the landscape in which we both lived. She had come down to New York to see the Cézanne exhibition, and she had never heard of Clive Bell's *Art*. She had been teaching her children all summer about bugs, and she had never heard of Fabre. She thought there was no revolutionary movement in letters like that in the graphic arts —she had never heard of Edgar Lee Masters or Paul Fort. I loaned her six books, and it came over me as I closed the door on her almost with a twinge of misery—the exclusiveness of books.

These thoughts wandered in and out of my mind like the motive of a Mozart air. I laid down my book and went to luncheon. Why doesn't some woman open a real bookshop, I thought, which would pick up all that is related to modern life in the currents that would flow in and out of the doors of such a shop and make them available; and bring to it the tradition of the professional spirit which puts its knowledge and integrity at the disposal of the community, and what it does not know, finds out, as a physician does. I cannot remember just when it began to seem to me that a bookshop of a

different kind must be opened in America, and opened at once, and opened by me. Important things to us happen in that way sometimes in a moment, as a work of art becomes a determination and a shape; and all our experience falls into place in a new way of dealing with the realities of our world. Even an hour before I had as little thought of opening a bookshop as I had of opening a coal mine. I expected to live always as I was living—with agreeable variations. I was working on a long piece of work. But I began to think quickly in the way we do when things are above what they usually are. I began to think of one friend who was the right person to do this with me, if she would do it. I did not want to go off half-cocked; and so, not to be too impulsive, I waited an hour, and then I called her up and asked her if I could come down for tea. I told her that I had an idea that was smoking in my mouth.

She was a sculptor's wife, teaching and lecturing on art and doing the housework of that little ménage with its manifold interests; and I remember that she was very jaded that afternoon, and she cried a little, being of Irish parents, and said that she did not see how she could possibly take anything else on. But of course it was not the kind of thing she could let go by. I expounded my plan in a rush—those things I have said so many times since. She and her husband and I sat in one end of the studio in

the increasing dusk and talked about it, and the little Bumper crop pushed his cars in deep reverie up and down a crack in the floor. I can see her husband now with his cigarette hanging on his lip and his finger in his beloved *Morte d'Arthur,* developing in his cool English accent the place in the world of such shops as ours would be. There was much throwing about of brains in that breathless hour of pushing a thought over into action. The idea "grew like the summer grass." By the time we sat down to supper it had already become a bookshop with a philosophy, a hundred of our favorite theories arrayed behind it, and rows of noble books upon its shadowy shelves.

I have felt a little dazed ever since that eventful Sunday. Neither of us had ever had anything to do with business. It was so remote from all our experience that we did not know enough even to be afraid of it. I knew one publisher, Mr. Alfred Harcourt. Mr. Harcourt considered me, I think, a person who might possibly make a score with a novel, but certainly not as the compound of merchant prince and social prophet, which I was about to essay. He was surprised when I presented myself in a new rôle in his office, and he surveyed me silently while I elaborated my plan. All publishers want bitterly such outlets for books as we were projecting, but Mr. Harcourt is one of those people who inevitably gets to be called a wizard—I sup-

pose because he is more interested in what is true than in what merely seems advantageous, and so things appear as realities in his cosmogony—the public, the author, the bookseller—all are something alive, not moves in a game existing for him to win. At any rate, he told me the truth—that bookselling is the great lost cause. He sent me to see Mr. Norman Baker, of the jobbing firm of Baker & Taylor, and several other people; and they all stared me coldly in the eye and said:

"But of course you know that you cannot possibly make bookselling pay. The only way any bookshop survives is through its stationery."

"Why does Brentano carry any books at all then?" I always asked them. "Why doesn't it carry only stationery?" And they could never answer.

Nobody was encouraging. There is a special and curious situation in the book trade different from that which exists in any other undertaking where buying and selling are carried on. It does not support the people who do it. The reasons for this situation I think I have come to understand. I have learned them from adding long columns of figures, from sitting through long sessions in booksellers' conventions, from studying stock lists and overhead curves. Nobody attempted to explain any reasons to us in those preliminary days, but we picked up a good deal of gossip about selling books. We learned that the book departments in such stores as Wana-

maker's and Gimbel's expect 10 per cent profit on books, and 50 per cent on muslin underwear, and that the book departments are retained only because someone in the firm is sentimental about them and they bring people into the store. The big nationally known firms, one is told, tremble near to bankruptcy, recover, and tremble near to it again. I do not know whether these stories are true, but we heard them, and I know now that they well may be. I have talked with booksellers from coast to coast in the last five years, and they make their livings out of office furniture, victrolas, toys, stationery; they live upon their investments, or their wives' money, and some satisfaction which comes often to simple and what seem verv literal people from selling a book.

The shop is all bound up in my mind in those first weeks with dinners and collections of samplers, Persian cats, little daughters brought in for me to see how they had grown and could curtsey, and caucuses over large and small tea tables. Katherine Anthony and Elizabeth Irwin caught up the idea on the finger-tips of their wit on the afternoon when I presented it breathlessly to them and passed it back and forth between them. They egged me on and begged me, whatever I did, not to call it Ye Little Bookie Shoppie. Clara Taylor, that bright figure, saw it all at once, supported it, and gave us everything. The Taylors were living in the old Perrine

house on Staten Island that winter, and I used to go out there and we would talk about it until midnight, with Harry Taylor making a dish of mushrooms over the last of the fire; and then I would go up and dream of it in an old bedroom so low that I could not stand up straight in it with my hat on, with a floor so uneven that to walk across it was like going to sea.

In those days of dim beginnings, when there was nothing of our shop but a sheet of paper, we made some tentative figures. I remember one evening we sat on the model stand and laid it all out very neatly and convincingly to ourselves, with the help of a young man with a Rossetti profile named Marshall, who had been one of the partners of The Little Bookshop Around the Corner. The traditional sum of yearly business which it is believed that any bookshop must do to survive is $20,000. This figure is the minimum countenanced by the steering committee of publishers which used to resuscitate bankrupt bookshops under the chairmanship of Mr. William Morrow of Stokes. We said to each other that night that an art dealer needs only five patrons buying $2,000 a year each to keep him afloat; and that if we could have fifty patrons who bought $500 worth of books a year, we would be safe. I have never felt surer of anything than that we could find that many. I have learned since how few people there are, except collectors, who buy $500 worth of

books a year. At the end of four years, we had seven hundred and fifty regular charge accounts and they averaged $15 a year. Only two bought over $500 a year. There are no statistics in the book trade, but one man who has a much better right to guess than most says that in the entire United States there are only two hundred thousand book buyers. Mr. Ernest Elmo Calkins, who has been making an intensive study of the situation, says that we buy a fifth of a book per year per person.

We must sell $20,000 worth of books a year; that was sixty books a day. Surely we could sell sixty books a day. Then under Mr. Marshall's direction we tried to lay out the overhead expenses. We thought they would go something like this:

Rent	$100 a Month
Secretary	60 " "
Boy	32 " "
Telephone	10 " "
Stationery and extras	48 " "
	$250
12 months	$3000

Our own salaries we estimated at $125 a month each. We said that we could not live on less than that. We never drew them except the first month. We allowed $1500 for initial expenses. Our proposed budget for the first year was thus $7,500.*

*These figures were, of course, for 1916.

Against this we told each other that we could expect, very roughly speaking, a discount of one-third on each book we sold. Counting the $1.50 book as the average book, the profit would be $.50 on each, and with much scattering about of fresh sheets of paper, we arrived at the conclusion that we should have to sell 46 1-3 books a day to make a shop pay.

"To think that I shall have to buy 46 books a day until the shop begins to pay," caroled one of our stockholders as she painted a chair blue and orange. These figures haunted all of us for a long time.

In two months we were selling books. We had incorporated, sold our stock, found the place, torn out two walls, built the bookcases with our own white hands, designed the stationery, trademark, announcements, labels, chosen the name and the color scheme of the room, worked out some plans for wrapping packages which were conspicuously our own, stamped and addressed and had in the post office 7,000 announcements, hired the inimitable Michael, and with barrels standing around in the room from which the hay was still pulled out on the floor, and Mr. Frank Bruce, of Houghton Mifflin, laying linoleum in the corner because he had come in and found women laying it in a way that no linoleum should be laid, we began to sell books. There was a cold hole in the wall through which an agreeable spring wind was entering, and we began,

not because we were ready, but because a black velvet lady came in who said that she was going to be sick with grippe the next day, and she could not be sick unless she had a book.

To find the place had been the first killing. We were both women to whom places mattered. Every morning during the early part of February I used to go out immediately after breakfast, hunting for it. It was damp penetrating February weather, and I would get home at night so tired that I used to feel like an ancient little elephant only able to flap one ear at a time and hungry enough to have eaten a publisher. I combed over every foot of the east side of Fifth avenue and all the cross streets from Twenty-sixth to Fifty-ninth. The east side is the correct side, and like all unconformers we had our partiality for being correct. We thought of a little rear room or a stable. Our theory was that if you have an idea you do not have to pay rent, and we were haunted by memories of "The Street of the Cat that Fishes" and other such places in Paris where one dives into essential romance. I soon gave up putting real estate men on the quest, because they did not know at all what we wanted and so, of course, they could not find it. For two weeks I pursued an old house which someone had once described to me as behind one of the loft buildings on the Avenue full of silk merchants. I never expected, as I listened, to want a house behind a loft

building, but now I did. One should never forget anything. It was always appearing and disappearing in front of me like a lantern on a country road. I never saw even a gable of it.

New York had a number of beautiful old libraries and dining-rooms left over in those days from the invasion of business at the lower end of the Avenue. Flagged gardens and old trees were visible from their windows, but with all the imagination we could command none of them was quite workable, and the rent was always too high. For a while we were caught by a group of rooms in the famous 291 building made historic to the art life of America by Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo Secession Galleries. The rooms had been the kitchen and laundry of the beautiful mansion which had once queened it there, and then they had been the workrooms of Mary Elizabeth's candy shop. They were now behind a cheap art store where two young Bavarians were selling the most awful reproductions of old masters and Japanese prints which it is possible to manufacture on a Jersey marsh. It was a disjointed little array of chambers with a vast chimney, once the maw of a great stove, and a small lean-to laundry which we saw as a tiny gallery for exhibitions. Along the end of the yard into which we looked was a stone wall with rivets for sculpture, and some crazy old stairs which ran up to a door from which it was obvious that a man sweeping a plumed hat

to his heels might any evening descend and offer one his arm. Everything was right except the owners, who, in spite of every blandishment, refused to let us use the little hall which ran back to that crooked, fascinating agglomeration of rooms. They were an estate and "das war eine harte Nuss." The day after this disappointment I found it.

I dug my umbrella into a crack to prop me up when my eye greeted it. We all stood around that afternoon—my partner, her husband, two devotees of bookshops as described by us, and the Bumper, and reiterated in a number of humorous and extremely well-expressed ways that it was the home of our souls; and the Bumper gazed out of the old bow window into the snow-hung street with his big quiet grey eyes and his air of a baby Jove and thought. It was incredible. It was beyond belief—like a dream you might have after reading *Tristram Shandy,* but there it was with its look of an especially charming toy with perhaps a place to drop nickels in the top. It was so fitted to our plan that it was difficult to tell whether it was made for our plan or our plan was made for it. It had a little projecting bow window cut up into small panes and a ledge for potted marigolds, and it had a handsome vast old door with fat cherubs blowing out their cheeks under the Jacobean roof-tree, and a tiled overhanging roof above it all. Tooth, the print man, had put it all in twenty-five years before, when Thirty-first Street was the

cream of the business section of New York. I remembered that I used to see Whistler etchings there when I came to New York from college twenty years before. Now it was the work-room of an antique store on the Avenue. It was decayed and colorless and below the dead line for fashionable shopping, but we knew what a lick of orange paint, and white about the window panes would do for it. It had a fireplace. It had a garden. It had a stained glass window of the 1880 school—nice if you liked it—and a two-leaf Dutch door. It is sentimental, and it is suicide to be sentimental, but one makes a connection like a feeling with certain places. I loved it the moment I saw it, and I loved it ever after; and sometimes when I went back after supper I used to lie a while on the settle before I went to work or out for the evening, and consider it as the quiet deepened in that little backwater street, and I grew to know every bolt and hinge in it. They were all queer, and good, and different from anything one sees in a New York apartment; and the proportions of the room were right. Only once in a great while they are right in a room so that they are a fact in themselves. They are right in the Florence Cathedral and they were in our first shop.

We signed the lease the next morning. The two men in the antique store who sublet it to us regarded us with a paternalism of the youngish, middle-aged variety. They treated us as if we were

sweet puppies whom anyone who happened near ought to bring in out of the wet. One was plump and suave and used to being liked, and I am sure that romance was not absent from his existence. The other was an extraordinary person with a brute of a temper and a brazen voice which made his little curios rattle on his Chippendale tables when he put on his big tone. This gunpowder Percy glared at you even in passing as if he killed him his six or seven dozen Scots before breakfast regularly, but he had not a particle of saltpetre in him when you put the cards on the table and told him what you would and would not do. We grew to like him best. There was something hearty and strong about him, and what he told us he would do, he did. The rent was to be $75 a month from October to June, and $50 for the four months of the summer when we expected to be in complete collapse. We were beginning in the spring, although we knew the summer was the bad time, because we wanted to learn our way somewhat about before the Christmas trade broke upon us. It was an incredibly low rent. More than any other single element in our undertaking at first, I think, it ranged us commercially and if publishers respect booksellers, it made the publishers respect us. It made every hearer stare. It was pure kindliness which gave us quarters practically on the Avenue for that. Our landlords joined the dance to help us as so many people have done since.

CHAPTER II

TWO walls were torn out and then the little low-browed room emerged. My partner and her husband and Mr. Howard Colluzi built the book-cases. I would race off to all sorts of outlandish places that I had never seen before and which smelled of coffee or were all whirling bands and pulleys, where they had some cord or raw silk or queer paper that we wanted, and when I came back we would sit down to a picnic lunch which we ate sitting on piles of lumber with the tea machine send-ing forth streams of steam upon the icy air. It soon developed that a bookshop was the coldest place in the world. In the summer the room was a cave, and in the winter it was a tomb. We called it "Medi-cine Hat," Medicine Hat being a station some-where on the Canadian Pacific which is the real site of the North Pole. In the winter only the open fire saved us, and sometimes it seemed as if it were painted upon the wall.

We intended the room to look like a place in which you could read a book. We were to conduct it like life, and it was to look like life. Kipling has a story of the first cave woman—that when her lord

introduced her to her first cave, she swept it out, laid a rug in front of the opening, and said:

"Now, my dear, from now on, wipe your feet when you come in. This is going to be a home."

The denaturalized warehouse rooms in which men do business seemed to us bad psychology for selling books. If we had to sell imagination about how to make yourself happy as you read them, along with our books, we would do it.

We had both been talking and thinking a great deal about color since the big post-impressionist show of 1915; and one theory of a little group of people to which my partner belonged was that a room should be built from a full prism—that a full chord of color would make a room more alive and complete and restful than two or three contrasted notes can do. Many interesting experiments were being made in color and one of the greatest of our artists was even painting with a Beethoven score laid on the floor open beside him. Our shop was the first experiment in a very bold color treatment in this country—before the Washington Square Players or any of the others who have changed the whole aspect of New York. Mr. Davies gave us the chord and laid it out for us in the room. Orange is said to be the selling color, and so our walls were a burning orange, with all the other colors of the palette he made for us, woven through and up and down the windows and woodwork and floor. It

was a "pot of paint flung into the face of the public," and the smiling little place made an immediate sensation. We were asked to do a Riverside Drive apartment, a tea room at Columbia, a room in a hotel, and a number of other things we had not thought of doing. We did a great many things we had not thought of doing.

I was always interested in the way this room affected people. An old New Englander with Vermont in her eyes was brought in once by her daughter to see it and get a shock. She folded her hands over her little round stomach and looked about.

"Why, how restful it is," she said.

We once had a Tammany politician with a bowler on the back of his head and a cigar tilted high in his mouth who made his tribute of admiration in his own terms.

"Gad, what a bar," was his comment to his companion, and there was real respect in his eyes.

The name was one of the crises through which we had somehow to get. There is sin and virtue in a name. We wanted a name that would mean something. Everything was to be significant. All kinds of titles of the thumb-nail variety were offered. Karl Zigrosser suggested Here Are Ladies. My partner telephoned me one day that Amy Murray had drawn up in the net of her Gallic wisdom the name The Sunwise Turn.

"They do everything daesal (sunwise) here"—Father Allen had told her of the people of Eriskay—"for they believe that to follow the course of the sun is propitious. The sunwise turn is the lucky one."

It met all our hopes so happily! It is an old, old racial heritage, one of the deepest feelings of primitive life that when you go with the sun you get with all the beneficent and creative forces of the earth. Frazer devotes a whole book in *The Golden Bough* to the myths of the sunwise turn. The key goes sunwise; the screw goes sunwise; the clock goes sunwise. Cards are dealt with the sun. The Gael handed the loving cup around the banqueting table sunwise; he handed the wedding ring and loaned money sunwise. An old sea captain who once came into the shop told me that wind and weather go sunwise, and once when I called in our Swedish contractor, Behrens, to confer with him about the furnace, he said: "It ought to be in the other corner of the house, ma'am. I always put my furnaces in the north end. Heat goes with the sun." Those were his very words.

It never quite seemed to me the name of a shop. It seemed to me like the name of a short story in *The Atlantic,* or a strange house that you might come upon on a turn of a wild road. But I liked the meaning, and meaning is what we live by. Our theory was that we meant to sell books in a more

modern and civilized way than they were being sold, and carry them, if the powers were in us, into the stream of creative life of our generation. So we became

THE SUNWISE TURN

A MODERN BOOKSHOP

The business world took a glance at this name and said that it could not be. It called us The Surprise Town Boot Shop, and The Unwise Turn Bookshop. One enterprising stenographer, turned loose apparently on the classified telephone directory, addressed us as The Sunwise Furn. Co., and asked if we were getting the best wholesale price on carpets. We had letters which opened "My dear Mr. Turn," "S. Turn Esq.: Dear Sir," and "Dear Sunbeam in charge."

"Y' know, Miss Jenison," said Michael, after he had considered the title for some days with some wrinkling of the nose, "I b'lieve I'll open a tea room next door here, and I'll call it The Likewise Turn."

We began to get in books—very carefully at first. The first day we went out to order our stock we bought everything that we liked and everything we especially wanted people to read; and we were horrified when we opened the boxes to find that our shelves were only half-filled. In that first buy were one hundred copies of *Hunting Indians in a Taxi-*

cab. Hunting Indians in a Taxicab was an account of how a woman made a collection of the cigar store Indians that used to stand in front of the little news and stationery and tobacconist stores fifty years ago. You found a new model only once in a blue moon, and then you dashed away in a taxicab and returned with it for your gallery. My partner and I could see ourselves selling this book hand over hand —it delighted us to the last scratch of ink. It was a remainder and we bought one hundred at 10c. a copy and planned to sell it at $1.00 a copy. It seemed to us a scandal. Hunting Indians grew to be the joke of the shop, and we pinned a medal on the breast of anyone who sold one. We had opened to sell Clive Bell's *Art* and we bought up at once the publisher's entire stock of that.

Beautiful pieces of sculpture and textiles and paintings began to come in. Our plan was to show a few such things all the time as they go into a room in which people live, and then take them down as the Japanese do and show a few more. As soon as you begin to think of books as life they connect up with art, just as when you think of them as commodities they connect up with stationery. Most of what came in to us was of the more revolutionary sort. I have learned that there is only one Philistine remark to be made about post-impressionism, as there is only one thing to say when you come into a bookshop. On enter-

ing a bookshop, you always say, "May I browse around?" A picture always referred to by Michael as "Japanese Lady Throwing her Dinner into the River" hung for a long time over the fireplace. I suppose some five thousand people must have struck a disjointed attitude in front of that picture and said, "And what is that supposed to be?" We made up all kinds of explanations. One flighty morning I managed quite a respectable fourth dimensional and mystic rhapsody with the seven hills of Jerusalem in the background. There was one memorable exception. She was a rather casual woman in a closely-fitted broadcloth suit of the kind that shows that she is laced but does not mind it. She considered the "Japanese Lady Throwing her Dinner into the River" carefully for some time and said, "And what is that supposed to be?" And then as she listened carefully to our explanation, her eyes swept around the room. They included three ancient Rajput miniatures, a Greek archaic mask, some batik hangings, sculpture ancient and ultra-modern, paintings by half a dozen different men, a drawing of somebody's grandmother in a wiggley scrawl, a Hopi bowl, some African tiles, some of Mrs. Zorach's embroidery, and a large Inness that one of our friends had asked us to sell for her.

"Why, he does all kinds of things, doesn't he?" she exclaimed.

You could have cleared away a little in our shop

and served tea in it by scratching a match. One day when we had been open about a month and I was still feeling, whenever I remembered that I owned half a bookshop, as if I must sit down and fan myself, I went up to Scribner's to leave an order in the publishing department. When I came downstairs I lingered in the bookstore to see how people sell books. This had suddenly become the burning issue of the world for me. A cruel despair fell upon me as I went about among the tables in that high elegant store.

"We can never compete with this," I thought, "never in the world—never—never—never." It was so big, so clean, so competent, so experienced, so assured. That feeling of being marked to die young or needing one's luncheon very badly took hold of me as I thought of our little haphazard shop strayed into this great highly articulated machinery of business. And then, as I stayed on, a chill began to fall upon me. It seemed so remote—as if it would be impossible to feel anything very passionately there, even to like books very much. When I went back to our shop a dog was tied to one of the table legs. There was a low fire, and broken sunlight from the little cut-up windows lay very quietly on the walls, and people were leaning up against the shelves silently reading, and others talking beside the big table, and there was something there alive

and aspiring which is not bought or sold, and I knew that we were bound to do what we had begun.

We sometimes had women come in from little towns with parlors where you sit in the evening between a bowl of gold fish and a Boston fern, who were going to start shops.

"But we haven't taste as you have," they would sometimes say, as they looked about wistfully. But it was not taste that made it what they liked. Even if a thing is not beautiful, it is living art if it is someone's experience. To do a thing as nobody else could have done it—if you can wrench that out of yourself—is style. Beauty is well enough, but I think I have found out that truth is greater than that, and any room or shop window or business letter that is honestly drawn from the burning center of someone's belief and not from the general vat of what everybody else does and thinks, has magic in it. There is nothing so magical as life. The trouble with business is that stores and windows and correspondence are not done that way.

A sign is not a murder, or a proposal of marriage, or a legacy from your uncle in Australia, but it can be quite an emotion. I remember one Sunday afternoon when Mr. John Adams lay on the floor and lettered a beautiful one for us. Mr. Henry Fitch Taylor, President of the American Painters and Sculptors, painted the other; and I suppose these signs pleased us more than anything else in those

preliminary weeks, unless it was our name. We had to get permission from the Department of Highways to put these signs up, from the Police Department, from the owners of the building, from the men from whom we sublet. We learned from these signs the invasion of civilization upon private impulses. We learned also the power of the feminist movement. The morning the sign men came to hang ours they put up the iron stays and wires and then the helper came in and told us that the traffic cop on the corner was going to arrest him if he went ahead.

"But why?" I said.

He shook his head. His manner conveyed the suggestion that it was not his business to explain policemen. It was his business only to hang signs, nothing more. Maybe it was not high enough or was too far out over the street, he suggested, and he sat and looked detached, as if he were a sea captain scanning the sky line or waiting for his carriage to take him to Pier 49 so that he could sail to Hongkong. I had gone into every exigency with all City Hall Square and I told the boy to go ahead, but he refused. He said that he was not letting himself in for a day in jail. He was plainly not one of those who can be persuaded against his judgment. I called up the Department of Highways and they said they would send up an inspector at once. They remembered the permit—we were quite within the

law. But the morning wore on and the inspector did not come—we were paying the boy by the hour. I consulted the antique store men who were our advisers in every crisis.

"Better not quarrel with the traffic cop. He can do you a great deal of harm," they said thoughtfully, as we stood looking out at a full-blooded young Irishman waving delivery boys imperially into the four points of the compass. But something had to be done and so I went out to talk to this donkey. As I explained the situation to him, he stood looking at me with half-closed eyes, with an expression so extraordinary that I could only stare back after a moment trying to break my way through to some understanding of overt meaning.

"That sign's too low," he snorted at his leisure, still eyeing me with that prize-fighter look.

"How dare you say that to me?" I said suddenly getting angry. "How dare you say such a thing when I can look all along this street and see signs as low as that and quite as far out in the street."

"It's queer, that now, isn't it?" he sneered, and then suddenly I came to life. I looked back at him a full instant before I took in what was being conveyed to me, and then I made him a suffrage speech —one for his own exclusive benefit, there in the middle of Fifth Avenue.

"Now, I want to tell you something," I said to him. "The Police Department of New York can

put its hand into almost everything—into the business world, into the vice situation, into bridge and street contracts, the press and where you hang your sign. But when you come up against the feminist movement you have met the wrong thing. I am busy just now, but I have ways of getting at Commissioner Woods, and I will just take two days if necessary to convince you that women are in politics. Have you any political friends from the States where they have had suffrage a few years? I advise you to call them up, and then please get in touch with the Department of Highways before three unless you wish to change your way of life. I will tell my boy to come back then. I should like to have him hang that sign."

They told me when I called up at 2.30 that they had not sent an inspector because the officer reported that we had met all requirements; and I did not note it on the stub of our check-book either.

We lost our garden. It was to have been a blue spot of bright water reflecting the clouds, and birds drinking on the edge, swelling their curving throats and hopping; a marble bench and sculpture with people reading in the spattering sunlight under the old ailanthus tree, or pacing up and down the flagged walk and talking about the ultimate reality. But the Armenian rug men and the feverish milliner, whose back doors opened on its triangular space, objected and we had to give it up. The Armenian rug men

sent a lawyer who said that he did not know what we might be going to do there—we might be going to open a stable. I asked him if we looked like people who would run a stable, and he said we did. The milliner was far more convincing. She was a tall, flushed, weedy woman who lived back of her pocket handkerchief shop, and she cried and said that square of grass and tree were the only things in her life she cared about and if we took them away from her, she would not go on. She told us that there were rats in that garden. We had to close up the hole the masons had already made in the wall. One morning about a year after she was found dead on the couch of the little room behind her store with the gas cock in her stove full on. The police said that she had put on her coffee and then she had lain down and fallen asleep and the coffee boiled over and put out the flame. The police know a good deal about these matters, but I have always been glad that we left her her murmuring tree for those days before the grave. I do not mind the grave, but I had an impression that she was driven into it rather by the awfulness of nothing than by the spirit of adventure.

It was a curious neighborhood—a world unlike any with which either of us had ever had to do before. Auction rooms, two-penny button and pleating establishments, two hotels of the smaller sort, the packing rooms of big Fifth Avenue stores

with delivery boys playing craps on the sidewalk in front of them at noon, cheap restaurants where we bolted quick luncheons between cabbies and messenger boys—the baked apples and potato salad always being very good in these places—this was our little street. There was a soggy-eyed clerk in the antique store, one of those

> ". . . . wretches
> Whose fever-weakened joints
> Like strengthless hinges buckle under life."

He always seemed to be leaning against some door jamb and his pitiful story—all women—we somehow managed to get told to us on an empty summer afternoon—unlike anything I had known could be. There was a solid old German real estate speculator, honest as a foot rule, and always fighting to save the trees of the neighborhood; and a little Jewish rat of an auctioneer with a *savoir faire* which no loftiness could pierce, and all sorts of queer stories of his trade which he would retail seating himself with perfect complacency at the table if he chanced upon you in a restaurant of an evening. These made up the camaraderie of a neighborhood of which we came little by little to be a part. They were almost all of them bounders, and we found the kindness and stifled cries that are in bounders; and perhaps in the Yale Club it is not so different, except that they have more strings to play their little tunes upon.

It was all utterly new to us, strange and dreamlike. All the world of business came to me as if a curtain had been drawn before my eyes, and I used to feel when I passed great office and loft buildings as if the tops of them had suddenly been lifted off and a new area of life unknown to me stood disclosed to me for the first time.

CHAPTER III

WELL, and so they were married. I never did anything so awful so quickly. Mr. John Emerson had gone to California the week after Christmas to begin being a movie magnate. He had come to say good-bye to us. I was peacefully writing a three-volume novel. The day after he came home he met a woman he knew on the street.

"Come on with me. I want to show you a new bookshop that has just opened," she said.

He came walking in. I seemed to see only the whites of his eyes.

"Well—what on *earth* are you doing *here?*" he said.

"I don't know," I said. "I've got a bookshop."

I can never remember the first person who put money into my hand and took away a book. I was nervous about the first morning. My partner had a class and could not be there. Lanky Frank Shay, of the Washington Square Bookshop, promised to come and stay with me, but he forgot it. I can never remember anything about the first morning, except that it seemed sunny and was exciting and passed in a breath. It was a Tuesday. We were

launched. We scarcely knew how. We used to look at each other as I suppose people look at each other who have a child to go rolling on down the ages, and do they know not what. "Did we do this?" we seemed to be inquiring of each other at times. I never came to the time when it seemed quite real to me. I never lost the feeling when I came around the corner that it probably would not be there, especially if I had been out of town; that it was something I had thought of or read about in a book of travel by Henry James, or that I had been asleep and in a few moments an alarm clock would go off and someone would tell me it was time to get up. And to see it again with its tiled roof and swinging sign and chubby cherubs, when I turned around the corner of Thirty-First Street, always gave me a shock of joyful wonder.

How we worked! I suppose it is really characteristic of us both that the word "work" occurred ten times in our announcement. We worked as a Beethoven sonata should be played, with the same abandon, the same joy, the same sense of connection with the beat of one's own heart and the rhythm of the world. We worked until my partner went down two flights of stairs and exercised her dogs for a block one day before she discovered that she had only the leash and no dogs; and I addressed a letter to Mr. Harry Berlin, The Crescent Moon,—and stepped into a bath with my shoes and serge dress

on. It was an intense and peculiar world. I had thought that each of us could be in the shop only half the time, and that in the alternate days or weeks when we were away we could go on raising Airedales and babies and writing serious-minded short stories and lecturing on art and doing the other things we liked to do. This bright delusion immediately vanished. The critical thing about a good idea is, of course, to have the force to put it through. I often thought the color in the room played its part in keeping us up to pitch in those months of terrific work. It became apparent almost at once that the staple sold and the staple taken in in this shop was going to be talk. I talked until I used to lay my tongue down in my mouth to rest at night. And when everybody had gone and the door was locked, we rolled up our sleeves and did the work. We poured into it our days and nights, Sundays, eyesight, tongues, tempers. We had no order clerk, we had no secretary, we had no bookkeeper, we had no accountant. We had nothing but an idea which drove us before it like steam. A woman lawyer, Miss Dorothy Straus, once said to me that she had heard that we did a very remarkable piece of advertising, that we had sent out thousands of letters written by hand. I suppose we did. We hurled them at everybody. Whenever we grew frightened, when things looked black, when we thought of a person or club or university or hotel or office or

restaurant or store that should have books they had not, whenever we had twenty minutes, we sat down at our wide blue table and wrote a letter. We sent them to everybody; and almost every important piece of work we did during the first four years was the result of a definite urgent plan initiated by us and generated from our theory of the place of books in life. On Sundays we sat down at each side of our table and put behind us mountains of work. We made piles and still more piles of lists. We never refused anybody who asked for one. One August Sunday I worked all day on a list of books on labor which Mary Dreier wanted to give for a wedding present. I did not get home until five o'clock. It seemed a curious way to spend an August Sunday. My brother, an engineer at the head of a big office, was home. I was almost too tired to speak, and as we sat on the river piazza after supper, he said thoughtfully, "Do you charge for lists like that?"

I said no, that we did not.

"They take so much time! People tell us we could charge for them, but we are afraid—we want people to read—so many people would not ask for them if they had to pay. It seems to be bread upon the waters. What do you think?"

"I think you are quite right," he said, "even from the most prosaic point of view. An office like mine is a center for engine trouble for anyone who wants

to come in. If people get to believe that you know about books, you will sell books all right."

I have found that I can hold any banker or business man beside whom I am placed at dinner spellbound by telling him the story of our finances. They were exciting. Grace Humiston suggested that we incorporate and sell stock, and we were delighted with this idea. We enjoyed everything, the incorporation seal, the stock book, the appearance of our own signatures over impressive titles. We began with $2500. It was plainly no water-color task to create a business in New York City on this capital. It was just at the beginning of the war, a bad time. We were both trained adventurers or I suppose we could never have done it. We had both in our time taken a series of jumps at things when we did not know where we should land, and we had always found that we landed somewhere. More than anything the shop proved to me the value of experience in life. If you have experience in life you can use it for anything. It is not expert, but it can become so more quickly than any other single thing.

One day when we had been open about a month, my partner came in late in the afternoon. She had come from a class and stopped in the bank on her way down. The room was full of people; as she crossed the room, she slipped a piece of paper into my hand. I read it as I listened to a tall young man telling me what he thought about the Russian mind.

It said, "Balance at the bank thirty-seven cents." We looked at each other squarely for an instant and then fell to selling books. In July and August some of the publishers began to send us what are called "drafts on sight." I had never seen a draft on sight and when the man brought the first one, I trembled like quicksilver—like Sancho. He seemed to be waiting for something to happen, so I consulted the men in the antique store. I asked them what one had to do about a draft on sight and they said, "Nothing. Do not notice them." So we did not notice them. I suppose our credit deteriorated with the publishers. One credit man wrote me that if I would only let him know what we meant to do, he would be very glad to be reasonable. I did not know what I meant to do. I was in a bad scrape and I meant to get out of it. It kept me awake at night. We used to feel our heads, as they said during the French Revolution, to see if they yet stuck on our shoulders.

We turned over our capital five times in the first year. The canonized amount of business one must do in a bookshop is $20,000. We did $12,192 the first year; $12,874, the second; $18,259, the third; $37,782, the fourth; at the end of the fifth year we were due to do $70,000 of business a year. We incorporated for $3,000 worth of preferred stock which we sold; and $2,000 worth of common stock which

was left in the treasury. At the end of the fourth year half this common stock was sold for $10,000.

Our capital was of course too small, but we made far fewer mistakes than we should have made if it had been larger. Perhaps it was "the deficit that saved us," as in a greater case. And I feel too that it is more of a test case. Yes, we did it under great difficulty, and it worked. If you get a thing like this started, it will not be allowed to die. It is too important. The grand remedy is to sell books.

June was always the biggest month except December. September was the poorest. On one depressing July 12 the first summer the sales were only $2.50; the next day an order came in the morning mail for $150. One fateful day that summer, with the thermometer standing at 96° Fahrenheit, we sold not a single book. It is incredible that the sale of a few books could matter so much to two mature people as they did to us in those days. I shall be earth some time and the grass will grow over me, but I shall not forget the fifteenth of January of that first year. There is nothing in the world except a battle like the two weeks before Christmas in a bookshop. There are whole days in which one does not eat anything or have a glass of water or wash one's face. It is like being the mother of ten thousand children and having them all come in at once for cookies and to have their mittens dried. One-

quarter of the year's trade is supposed to be done by a bookshop in the month of December. It seemed to us that first year that we had sold a million books during the Christmas sales, as if we must, when accounts were cast, be some thousands of dollars ahead of that bottomless "consumption of the purse." On the first Sunday after the fifteenth of every month it was my practise to lay out all the publishers' accounts on the chaise-longue, where I had once been accustomed to read delightful books, and sweeten each one as best I could. I spent the whole day of January 15, 1917, checking publishers' statements and our assets in incoming bills.

"Oh, never was the heart of hope so hot within me." But such a damp struck through it when I totalled up those two columns of figures and found that we were still $4,000 behind, that it made me really ill. I had to go out to supper and they laughed at me, I was so pale and shaken. I could never have done it alone. I should never advise anybody to take these shipwreck voyages without company. I shall always think of my partner that "long years back she was my battle friend." When one of us was down, the other was always up. I used to be grateful to her for her gallantry, and the fact that she was the "active motor temperament," and even for her prettiness, and I often felt, when I looked across the room at that blessed Simonetta-in-the-spring head of hers with the braids wound

around it, as if courage were in the set of it on her shoulders. We both did it for the love of life and we believed in it first and we believed in it last.

Our victory was that we had an idea. Our idea was that thought is the great function by which we all live. "Why, this is the world's soul." Bookshops are its way of passing current, more important than universities, than schools, than public libraries, because they cater to maturity and are in the thick of affairs and work. I thought much about the shop. I tried to see the idea set in the world—to understand its place. Every morning when I went down I had a new idea for it. We thought the reason that bookshops do not pay is that they need more brains. "I think so then and I thought so still." They are not expert or professional enough. Miss Alice Dempsey, of Gimbel's, used to say to me, "You and I can never meet. I am a merchandising woman. I am not interested in one of anything. I am interested in piles of three hundred and to see them go down—and a book on esoteric Buddhism makes *me laugh!*" But you can not do ideas that way. The big merchants keep talking about service, and by that they mean getting a book there the afternoon after you order it. We were thinking of something less easy and more important than what they call service, as a surgeon may not come on time, but provides you with something more important than time when he arrives.

We heard a good deal about one woman who was said to be "the best book woman in New York"; she knew the dates of all the Shakespere folios and "all such other matters of great port." But who wants to know the dates of Shakespere's folios? The booksellers we want are those that will make us read *Timon of Athens* instead of *This Side of Paradise;* or when you are a shuddering young soul who has just heard that her husband is dead in the Somme mud, will find you some books that will tell you a way to go on.

"Say, have you got any more books by that fellow that wrote 'The Return of the Native' somebody gave me in here the other day. Who is this man Hardy anyway? Did he write any more books?" a fat young business-man with the catching-a-train-to-Albany manner asked me once. That is the bookselling that matters. Every one of the high commissions that came over here during the war sent us a member—the Belgian, the Dutch, the French, the English, the Scandinavian, the Italian, the Japanese. These gentlemen, jingling with chains and sabres and furled in capes, often regarded us quizzically when they first came in. What we learned from them! They all wanted the American books on education and the organization of industry, the two fields in which America is leading the world in thought, and we knew these books. I suppose it passed from one to another of them. When Mr.

Patrick Geddes was made president of the new University of India in Bombay, he let us make up the American section of its economics and sociology library. Lady Henry gave us an order for a library for mothers and children in a *crèche* in London. It was what we did not know about books that was our only handicap. We knew to be true what we said, that if you are trying to rear a child, or administer a business, or get back your health, or amuse yourself, there are ideas that will help you, and those ideas are in books. If you go into any automobile salesroom on Broadway and indicate that you are going to buy a car, the salesman will talk to you for two hours. He can tell you about his car from the bottom screw to the top. But if you ask in a bookshop for Irving's *Sketch Book,* the little girl says sweetly, "Who wrote it, *please?*" and then she asks somebody else and they ask somebody else, and at last they bring the head of the department from the balcony to ask you if you know who the publisher is.

We have all told these stories. It is one of the favorite protests of booksellers that salesmen cannot be expected to read all the books they sell. Someone always gets up at conventions and says this. My partner and I never let this argument get by us. For you cannot possibly on your life sell books unless you do read them; and moreover nothing would so quickly sweep the counters of poor

books and the stock rooms of dead stock as having the people who buy them for a store and those who sell them read them. Tney would always like something and there is always a reason why you like a thing, and that reason would be theirs, instead of being one which a reader in a publishing house thought that the salesman would think the bookseller would think the public wanted. The relation of the bookseller and the publisher is pernicious. It is the relation of the emissary. The salesmen always used to come in at first and tell us that there was to be an advertisement in *The Times* on Sunday as per exhibit, and then we were supposed to order a hundred. As long as you are selling something that somebody else tells you to, you are a tradesman and not a merchant, with the inflection of a German officer speaking of the English tourist.

Books are not big game commercially, but surely if it is worth while to sell them at all, it is worth while to sell them well. Our answer was always more brains. We tried all sorts of ways. We tried to throw our whole program into a larger pattern where a sale would be not one book but twenty or thirty or fifty. A furrier around the corner asked us to get him up some books on furbearing animals, their habitat and propagation habits. He was a German. This was our first trade library. We made up such units on silk, on jewels. We had a plan—we called the people who used it subscribers.

They were people who told us to send them anything we read and thought they would like to see.

"Do not send me any lists to mark," a lawyer said to me. "I can not mark lists. Get some good books on my table. I have half an hour every night after I get home before I have to dress for dinner, and if they are there I will read them."

At the end of the fourth year I had a list of subscribers which made an immediate small but important public for any good book. We never did any of these things as they should be done. I felt sometimes like a baby with a ball, as if we threw up each idea once and then let it drop. But very much of what we tried to do, we did. It was surprising how much it all worked out as we planned it. I used to marvel at it in full action before me—not a detail of the idea that was not in operation. I believe that it is easier to do all things than we think.

Of course, one of our advertising secrets was that we tried to make the shop a cult, something unlike other things, and offering one a breath of experience even to buy a book there. This was especially true at first before we were so involved in the idea and more in establishing it. The colors in the room began it. Quite innocently we worked out, too, some special ways of wrapping packages for presents, which became so popular that they were a curse upon us, and I perhaps shall never be able to see a piece of red fire-cracker paper flutter off a

table without experiencing a slight nausea. Everybody says that personality is power, and we tried to show that this is not an epigram but a fact that will sell books.

And thus, not because we thought of it, but because selling books is a very human thing, the shop became a very human place. We never turned anybody away who seemed to want anything from us. If a fat boy called up to ask us if we knew of a room with a southern exposure for his sister; or anyone inquired if we knew any way of getting a musical education for a boy violinist whose father was a waiter at the Biltmore; or if we knew a veterinary for Mme. Pavlova's dog; or where you could buy peacock's eggs; or whether we would be willing to have a series of lectures on libertarian education given at the shop; or if we would suggest a name for a restaurant at Columbia; or if someone asked if she could come at 5.30 and talk about her life; we always said "Yes." Once a little woman stayed in the shop one whole Saturday afternoon, trying to decide whether she should get a 50-cent French-English dictionary for her boy who was sailing to France with the American Expeditionary Force the next day. It was a bad afternoon. She told us a great many things about him including his manners when he was a baby. She cried and we cried. She went off at last without the dictionary, because she thought she had one in the bottom of her trunk, and

if she did, she said, she did not want to buy another. She came in on Monday morning to tell us that it was not there after all. She had looked all through the telephone directory trying to find one of our names, because she knew if she could find us, we would go down to the shop and let her have it. It made me smile to think of Brentano's or Scribner's opening shop on Sunday morning to sell a 50-cent dictionary. But, of course, it was not a question of sales so much as of sons.

And on the other hand the account was heavy. Everybody helped us. The shop belonged to the life that came into it as much as that life belonged to it. Augusta Rucker and Eleanor Comstock came and asked us if we wanted them to buy stock. People delivered our packages in their cars. They wrote down their own orders and wrapped their own packages. One wet twenty-third of December a woman came in about half-past eight who said wistfully that we must be having a very good time and feel at night that we had taken a hand in making a good many people happy. I said that we did.

"I am one of those unfortunates—I do not think there is a person in the world to whom it really matters whether I am alive or not," she said.

I said briskly that it could matter a great deal to me.

"I'll go and telephone my husband," she said, and when she came back she took off her coat and hat

and worked all day in a stuffy stock room wrapping packages. I had never seen her before and I have never seen her since. As I flew past her I would say, "That is Mme. Guilbert," or "That is the Marchioness of Aberdeen," or "That is Randolph Bourne," and her face glowed as if she had just been born. She went out at noon and bought us a large pair of scissors and the right kind of a brush for our paste pot.

"Count the spoons," said somebody and we did. They were all there.

We never refused anybody who said that she or he would like to come and work with us. In the winter of 1919-20 we had eight unpaid apprentices —all women of a great deal of background. They sold thousands of dollars worth of books for us. They filed invoices. They swept floors. They ran on errands. Sometimes they did everything well. I have sometimes secreted a smile behind a monograph to see the daughter of the editor of the Kansas City *Star,* very big and handsome, sweeping off the sidewalk because Allen Street Minnie hated to do it; or Peggy Guggenheim, in a moleskin coat to her heels and lined with pink chiffon, going out for electric-light bulbs and tacks and pickup orders at the publishers, and returning with a package large enough to make any footman shudder and a careful statement of moneys disbursed.

Once I was showing books to a black velvet lady

with glittering clean white gloves. She wanted something for a gift and I was laying some things I had collected down before her. She was one of those occasional people who put shop girls in their place and she said to me sharply, "If you would hold them up for me to look at them, perhaps I would buy some of them." It occurred to me for a moment that it did not in the least matter to me whether she bought them or not. Then I reflected that there might be something wrong with her. There *must* be something wrong with anyone who acted as ridiculous as that. Perhaps her husband was the credit man of Macmillan's. I stared back at her while she raked me with her lorgnette, and went on trying to sell her a book. I cannot remember whether she went off with anything or not.

The next Christmas in one of the mad Argonne forest days the boy who was packing in the basement came up and told me that some of the packages already wrapped would have to go out. He said, "Ma'am, they're coming down so that we can't climb over them."

I looked around for something to fall out of Heaven to save us, and it did. A woman who was turning over books on a table at my elbow lifted her head and said, "I will take them out in my car if you wish. You did something nice for me once," she said, "and I have always intended to do something for this shop."

She seemed familiar but unpleasant. The boy brought them up. There were thirty-eight of them, and we showed her how to sort them into neighborhoods and charged her that each package must be signed for in the delivery book. I remembered during the afternoon that she was the woman who had put me in my place. There are so many of these stories that I cannot think of the shop without this interplay of what we gave and what we took.

This was our idea, and we fought for it because it seemed to us to have liberty in it for human beings.

CHAPTER IV

SEPTEMBER came and found us baring our right arms. Somebody asked Siéyès, the French statesman, what he had done during the Reign of Terror. He responded, "I lived." I often think that you are never really brave unless you are afraid. I do not know what I was afraid of. I was afraid of the dark. September is the worst month for bookselling. It passed. We were at "the opening gate of the year," bitten to the bone by what we were doing.

I believe everyone likes to keep a shop. It is one of the thirteen rivers of fairy land. Playing house and store, going on a visit, being a general or a pirate, having children whom you punish—we act in these great race romances until we ask for a trained nurse and five feather pillows in the company of which to die. What is romance? It is something beyond experience and of it—wide—with a touch of the road and sky in it.

We never had an apprentice who did not want to sell. They always began by being modest and saying that they could only file invoices and dust the tops of the shelves, but some breezy morning al-

ways found them explaining to some attentive person the difference between Neil Lyons and Dostoyefsky and writing down an order with an air of having found their native land. Once when we wanted to make a "gaudy day" together at a big luncheon given by Gantt and Charles Ferguson, we left a woman in charge of the shop who had had a husband, six sons and daughters, three grandchildren, a country seat, and four legacies, and when we came back we found her palpitating with an excitement which might have done for a coronation.

If they cannot sell to anyone else they will sell to themselves.

"Well, how did you get on?" I asked Anne Evans, of Denver, when she sent me out to get a cup of tea one quiet afternoon that summer.

"I sold those," she said, and indicated with her eyebrows a pile she had collected on a bench.

It was one of the revelations of my life to find the excitement there is in selling things. I look at shop girls now with understanding in my eye—their funny little well-suppressed exultation when they get rid of something that has been around a long time, the whispering behind a screen, the lowered voice in which they say, "This is reduced"—it is all so known to me what they feel. I suppose we are all salesmen selling our league of nations, our charm, our power to create a home, our philosophy of credit or immortality. The ability to deal with

men is a technique and to wield it is victory. I had been lending books all my life—sometimes five at a sitting—and to sell them was little different; but it used to startle me at times to pile them up so that they were tottering on all the adjacent chairs and table corners, as if I had taken a human being in the palm of my hand and held him there at attention. Mr. Kroch, of Chicago, says you have only to get "a talking point"—a few sentences. One learns by a flick of the eyelash what is the right thing to say first—you scarcely learn—it is picked out for you by a hundred pointing fingers. It seemed to me that a single sentence or thought gradually emerged from all one's reactions to a book because it always worked, literally always—that a single phrase or almost a word sold *The Gay Dombeys, The Voyage Out,* Waldo Frank's essay on America, and seventy-five copies of Helen Marot's *Creative Impulse in Industry* in a single week in August. It is all in the way that words are arranged next to each other, as Mr. McClure used to insist with such vehemence.

"Look at the Bible," he would say. "Greatest journalism ever written. Look at the headlines. 'In six days the Lord made Heaven and earth.' "

I have often wished that the publishers could have these talking points to use on their book covers instead of the customary statements that the author is greater than Balzac and Dostoyefsky. They are cut so thin and fine and checked through a thousand

critics. Booksellers look into the eyes of the public. They know what it says back.

A group of young *Sun* reporters debated sharply with us one day the professional selling of books which we were defending. They did not want anyone to select their books for them, they said. Do they imagine that their books are not selected for them? Why, their wives are selected for them by George Lorimer when he chooses Mrs. Preston to do the illustrations of the stories they read in the *Post*. They drink milk and eat raisins when the advertising men tell them to. Their cigars are selected for them, their breakfasts, their religion. We all read what the publishers and our friends pick for us. To me it seems that the solution of personality is not to stand off and say that you are going to preserve your integrity intact; it is to get in and affect the things that are affecting you. You can not agree in a bookshop to give people books they will like. My best friend once tossed *Conrad in Quest of His Youth* back to me on the end of a hat pin. You can only sell people yourself, your criticism, and the "rage" of the Greeks and the belief that a fine book is well sped off the shelves of a bookshop into any private hands. A man may not get what he goes after in a package of books, "but he will never get anything unless he goes after something." I mourn over other things more than over

the good books I have sold to people that they have not yet read.

I do not know what sells a book. Eloquence will sell it. John Cowper Powys can get all Milwaukee to read Milton. How? He makes it so vivid, sets it so in the pattern of the world of his listeners—it seems such a burning joy to read Milton that you rush out of the door for it as if you were keeping tryst with a great spirit. You can sell *Don Quixote* and *The Trial and Death of Socrates,* if you like them as well as I do, as if they were today's news with the ink damp on the page. Integrity will sell a book, or vivacity, or even the heavy hand of authority. Once, after we had moved up to the Yale Club building and had four years of education behind us, a man came in from one of the neighboring clubs who said, when I spoke to him, that he "Just wanted something to read." He seemed to indicate by this reservation that he did not wish to be mistaken for a cultivated person or one who has any active intellectual interests. He was the broad brush H. G. Wells type of man and he bore himself like Turgenev's hero, "as if he were not a real man but his own statue erected by public subscription." Lord Leverhulme's book on the six-hour day lay on the table against which he was leaning, and the title caught his eye. That, he informed me, was the kind of book he did not want; and he told me

in passing what he thought of working people. He thought very badly of them. They were all thieves and slackers. The only way a man could manage his own business, etc., etc. He seemed to be one of those people who know. Like Whistler when in his best form, he was not arguing with you; he was telling you. It was very, very hot. It would have taken seventeen years to make even a beginning with him, and I did not attempt it. He was an Englishman. He had come over here and had been successful, I gathered, in some industry. He was not unusual but a success. I wanted to edge him gently out of the door with a good book to work its poison on him, but fate did not intend that. The center table was always groaning under all kinds of reform, and an unfortunate book on feminism lay close at hand. So then he told me what he thought about women. He thought even worse of them than he did of working people. They were all fools and liars, only out for what they could get—no principle—no imagination—no, he did not say imagination—he did not know about that. It was "tiresome enough to make a man swoon." Rather absently I picked up what I thought to be the perfectly irreproachable English thing. I was in the middle of it and it seemed to me a book to inflame a stump. It was Charnwood's *Lincoln.* But I fell foul of him even with that. He began to tell me what he thought about niggers.

He was the real bred-for-points Tory mind without a single break in form. I listened for a few more platitudes and then I began, as boys say, to rock him out. I had not been listening to members of high commissions and great economists, and reading books upon end on economics, for nothing in those full four years. It was not fair. It was not "fighterlike." All I knew and thought was "thrown into parliamentary form"; it was tested against the picked minds of two worlds. I had talked to men weary with what they understood, and he had never talked to anyone except servile underlings and brow-beaten women or some prattler on an observation car. My partner winged me a glance over the edge of the balcony. Brown rolled his eyes. I was wearing grey muslin with a black sash, as the autobiographies say. My opposite tried first to interject an occasional retort. He assumed the manner which says, "Let her talk. Never get started with a woman." Then at last he fastened his eyes upon me and listened. He stayed on. I know that hunger which sat in his flat eyes because I have experienced it—that starvation to feel that you are floating less uncaptained by some "continuity and force." I asked him why, if all women were fools, he stayed and listened to me. He said that it was interesting.

After a while I began to pile up books for him to read. I told him that, if he were going to talk

about such things, he must inform himself, that there were people speaking with great authority—profoundly—students—that he must be equipped, he must at least know what the enemy was doing. Oh, when you have just enough brains to be definite, it is hatefully easy to rule your fellow men. For a moment it passed through his mind that all this river of fine words might have been thrown in his face for the sake of selling him a few books. But I did not let him pull off even this consolatory thought. I caught it in his eye and told him how it seemed to me that suspicion was cramping and duping him more than any deceit could do. "The show was afire," and I could not stop myself. I was still talking while I made his change, and I made it wrong in our favor. He looked from it to me—could it be?—he wavered—we both burst out laughing. I suppose he went back to Appleton, Wisconsin, or wherever it was that he carried on that business and private life which he managed entirely himself, and told his wife that he had met with a shop girl in New York who could "give the bastinado with her tongue" so that you abandoned your change.

We like telling these stories where we are as brave as a lion. Perhaps this is only a braggart one, but I thought of it always as evidence that even the most bumptious will give way before what is really valuable. We fail in bookshops by what we

do not know. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed," and in the strike for quality which has been going round the world, if bookselling could take its place and pass on with generous hand what it drew from the whole world, what would not speak that is now dumb, and waken that is dead?

We always considered it a great killing to sell a book to a publisher. Mr. Knopf used to come occasionally at noon and buy royally.

All the big sales gave us at first "a very great emotion." One Saturday afternoon when we had been open about three weeks, Mrs. Philip Lydig called us up on the telephone and asked us if we could send her a list of books to have about her country house for the summer. She was to have some especially intellectual young guests—she named over the subjects in which they were interested. We swept away everything Sunday morning and worked all day on the list. It was delivered by a messenger boy at 4.30. The next day Miss Graham Mulhall came in and brought us a message that Mrs. Lydig would take all those books if we could have them ready by noon. Oh, that five hundred dollar order! How it fortified us. Sales were important things in those days. She came in a lilac limousine and took it away full, and then she came and filled it again "in golden multitudes." Our little shop looked as if we had moved uptown when we sat down in the ruins of it.

CHAPTER V

A WEEK before we opened we put up a notice on the bulletin board of the League that we would like a boy who was working in one of the night classes, and Michael O'Neil responded. Michael was a tall, cool Irish boy, with a sharp nose and a touch of quiz to the eye. He regarded us from the first day with a mixture of awe and ironic amazement which he found difficulty in reconciling. He came from Waterville, New York, and he had worked there for a butcher. He knew how shops ought to be conducted. One with neither a cash register nor a petty cash book, such as in the haste of our entrance into commercial life, ours was, to Michael appeared one of the things that just could not be. He threw his weight on the side of system whenever he could, and the organization which we gradually built up and which he would review when he came back to visit us later on Fourty-fourth Street, made him purr with delight.

Cool as a drop of dew, steady as a watch, he had a curious poignant yearning over art which seemed to me entirely his own. He used to disappear for hours at a time when he went to deliver books to Mr. Davies' studio, and I suppose Mr. Davies did

the handsome to him of those glowing stacks of drawings and ranks of canvases and the cabinet of treasures behind the door. He considered the Prendergasts, and Mr. Jerome Myers, and Walt Kuhn, and other painters who came into the shop, with conclusions more carefully arrived at, I think, than have often honored these gentlemen; and he debated post-impressionism and the experiments which have followed it, in long discussions with my partner and her husband, in which the wit and philosophic outlook of Waterville, New York, stood up very well against a mature international experience. His wit played all around us and we held up anything we were doing to watch his imitations of difficult customers, or Mr. Homer on the question of the furnace.

One morning when I went in I found him draped over the broom in an attitude which indicated that he had been holding the pose for some time.

"Y' know, Miss Jenison," he drawled in that long cadenced Yankee Irish which went with the spark in his eye. "Y' know, there's one thing that bothers me—sometimes, an' sometimes—makes me think I'm not a genius—an' that is that I haven't got a single fa-a-ault."

Michael was the first episode in a long blithe chapter of stock room boys. The morning after he decided against art and told us that he had a good position in chemicals if he could take it that day, a

young Scotch actor glanced up from a thick book on Harlequinades which he was reading on the settle under the window and said, "Why, I will be your stock boy for a week or two until you can get someone, if you like."

He was one of those young beings all gifts and no qualities except a genius for friendship which bookshops are sure to acquire. He was laying off trying to recover from his contribution to the militant suffrage movement in England. He had been forcibly fed in prison.

He wrote poetry, danced, sang folk songs, had acted in Miss Horniman's company. I knew that he could not be a stock boy, but I thought that he might, with a ditty and a pirouette, collect books from Baker & Taylor's and wrap them up for a day or two, and we could deliver them by mail. I gave him a key and told him to come at 8.30. He looked startled and I was not surprised that he was not there when I arrived. I turned up my cuffs and cleaned the shop myself. About ten o'clock an elegant young man, with a look of the fitting rooms of the best tailors and a Malacca stick hung on his arm, pushed the door open and proffered me a note from Allan. It said,

Dear Joint Owners of a Book Shop in Spain:

I owe you a thousand apologies but I cannot come to be your office boy. Please forgive

me the trouble I am causing you even as I forgive my stomach the trouble it is causing me. I also have a cold in the head. I am going to the country.

Im liebe,

ALLAN.

"But this lets us in terribly wrong," I said to the elegant young man. "I depended upon Allan. There are twenty packages to be delivered and orders to be picked up from the publishers. What shall I do?"

"How would you like me for a stock boy?" he said, quite calmly, as if it were the first act of a musical comedy. He looked like a member of the diplomatic service, as indeed he was.

"I do not know. Can you wrap a package?" I said.

"I do not know" he said. "I have never tried."

He had a dinner engagement at the Ritz that night and he would have to get away in time to change his clothes, he said. Otherwise the bargain was complete. We paid him eight dollars a week. I never knew just what it was all about. He was the son of some wealthy California people. He had been in the Belgian legation under Brand Whitlock and for some reason come home. He was utterly delightful; he did everything well; and I recommend him hereby as the chief of any legation or

president of any corporation which may eventually prevail upon him to serve in its interests. I used to arrive and find him with his shirt sleeves rolled to the shoulder and an auxiliary corps of brooms and mops and buckets of water, swashing the sidewalk or floor from curb to wall in the best Belgian tradition. One day he was talking, as he polished off, of Mrs. Frank Lowden, one of the friends of his family.

"Of course, Mrs. Frank Lowden or Mrs. John Alexander or Mrs. Zabriskie Gray may come in here any day and find you mopping the floor," I suggested.

"I do not mind if they do," he said serenely, and it was plain that he did not.

Whenever this *jeune dorée* appeared in the door on his return from his round of errands, lifting his straw hat high above his head, I would rise and advance and think I was going to sell him a hundred books, and then I would perceive that it was our office boy.

I cannot remember just who came after the Belgian legation. Perhaps it was Isaac, who went on a trip to Cleveland with the money which he was to have deposited one morning. He wrote us that he knew we would understand—they always are sure you will understand—and we did. It was the days when Fifth Avenue was strange and bright with dancing banners and the sound of marching

feet and ringing bugles and I often felt myself that I must run up a gangplank and steam off somewhere, and even a bookshop could lock its door and wait.

It was the second summer that we gave sanctuary to Jean Sebastian Bigger. He was a talented young Scotch pianist. It was a bad time in England for talents. He had come to America with letters from important people, but America too was preoccupied by the rolling of bandages and the organizing of drives. Everybody had forgotten him. One day when he came in to see us he had had nothing to eat for two days. We were not an eleemosynary institution, but hunger is one of those questions which has not two answers. Mary glanced at me and I glanced at Mary, and we engaged him for our stock room boy. He could not do in the least a single thing he was there to do. He was so willing that he made you sick, but I have never seen anyone so unrelated to the thing he was there for. The only thing I ever saw him attack with entire competence was conversation. He loved to converse. He would come in from an errand, drop his hat on the corner of our table, fling himself into a big chair, and converse until we took him by the hand and led him away or hunger gave him the signal that closing time had come. One day he discovered *Jean Christophe* and until he had galloped through those three monumental volumes he was nothing. If there is one thing for which I have respect, it is a person

who is reading a book, and I have often glanced at him huddled in a chair, with his hat cast on the floor beside him, sunk deep in bliss, and let packages which he should be delivering lie on the shelf; but when he found an engagement to play in a motion picture theatre, we sped him on his way with loud acclaim.

One night, more than two years later, the day after we had moved up to the Yale Club, I went up to dinner at the Ansonia with some very pleasant English people. They had been asking me for a long time and I had never been able to go so I went that night, though the day had been a mountain of packing boxes and dust pans. It was a warm autumn evening, the window curtains blowing in the frames. A pleasant little collation was spread in our hostess' sitting room. Who should present himself as the other guest but Jean Sebastian Bigger? He wore glasses and his hair in a curly mop above his round red mouth. He blushed when he saw me —he had not our young Californian's carelessness and I seemed for a moment, I think, party and cognizant to a regrettable incident of his career. But he soon thought better of it and fell to the work of conversation in the old way. After dinner he was asked to play. I had never heard him play. He had suggested once that he might have a metronome and a silent keyboard in the stock room upstairs for practising when he was not busy, but we had never

arranged that. He objected to playing at first. If he were once started he could never stop, he said. It was true. He played for almost three hours without speaking to us again—all Beethoven and Bach, and as beautifully as a great seraph. I slipped down in the corner of the Chesterfield where I had sat politely discussing the Gary system and the psychology of the unconscious, and went to Heaven. It was one of those times when you seem to look into the face of art itself, and nothing is true but its angelic strength.

Between these distinguished personages there was many a quick young Jewish boy and young American, with his bicycle, and boy scout mottoes tacked up about his head. As the shop grew larger I did not work with them in the same intimacy or know them well. But there was one more figure so full of character, so graphic that the shop came to circulate in some organic way about him as everything circulates about personality. He was an old Irish veterinary named (of all names) Lou, whom we took on in the dearth of boys in the winter of 1920. He had been a veterinary in the Irish fusileers. He knew dogs and horses as I know Boswell's *Johnson.* When he dusted the books, we would hear him muttering, "W-u-u-ush! W-u-u-ush!" to them as you drive a horse over in the stall to curry it. It was almost impossible to believe in the reality of the way he looked. I used to happen on him sometimes

in the Grand Central Station or on the street and I would always stare at him an instant before I could realize that he had anything to do with the real world where we all look alike. Fate knows how he kept his trousers upon his hips with that deft twirl, and I cannot tell how his hat had weathered to that theatrical green or bent into those multifarious cocks.

Once when three of us had our heads together over some rather face-about French from a Paris publisher, Lou marked time in the background for a while, filling inkwells and flicking shelves, and then suddenly he appeared from behind a bookcase.

"I guess I can translate that," he said—which he did with the greatest ease and clarity.

We began then to wake up to Lou as character and experience. His mind had a beautiful Victorian bouquet. Even when he was *risqué* it was very mild, and the things he whispered would now be shouted from the top of Washington Arch. He had gone to the University of Dublin. Oscar Wilde's father had been the family oculist. He had no comment on the poet. The brother was a fine mount, Lou said. Lou took a look at everything that went through the shop. His critical attitude toward literature was easily influenced along horse lines.

"*The Sheik* now—Mrs. Clarke don't think much of that," he said, "but ah, it's a fine book."

He never could get over the feeling that some

books just aren't for sweet, nice, beautiful young ladies to read.

"Oh, now, I wouldn't read that book if I were you," he would say to Ruth McCall unhappily.

We came upon him once in the stockroom considering Frederick O'Brien's new masterpiece *Atolls of the Sun.*

"This gentleman writes a good many of these books, doesn't he?" he commented, meditating over the gentleman. "But the pictures is fine," he added, brightening over one of a dark lady clad only in a smile.

He knew every coupé and hansom driver in New York.

"You see that white mare?" he would say, pointing one out three blocks away among the automobiles before the Plaza. "She was a likely mare three years ago."

"But Lou, there isn't any horse there," his companion would say. But there always was.

"How do, Meigham," he would say when it came alongside.

"How do, doc," said Meigham.

A young social leader and grandee who frequented the shop dashed off a card in French with some frowning one afternoon. It was to go in a book of verse that had been especially bound for him to a lady whose name is a key if you are doing the social whirl.

"He says his soul is in her hands, but that tense isn't right, Mrs. Clarke," said Lou, holding it up in the stock room.

In about the time it would take him to get to a dictionary, young Fitzhugh was on the telephone in some agitation. Hold that book; he would be in in about an hour; he wanted to make a change in it.

"Oh, do you mean the card?" we heard Lucy, the young bookkeeper who always wanted everybody to be happy, saying sweetly over the telephone. "Our Lou corrected that for you, Mr. Fitzhugh."

We all rushed toward her. It took a little time to placate young Fitzhugh when he came in, but Lou was called up, and I saw them with their heads together over it.

"Fitzhugh-Fitzhugh—there's many's the time I rode with his father in the county runs," said Lou when he described the incident.

Lou will never read this book through—it has not a horse to its tailpiece, but if he should ever get as far as this, I wish he would like what I have said of him because, though he has not where to lay his head, and his meals are as may be at Thompson's, I respect his way of living that is quicker than thought to help lame dogs over stiles, so much more so than that of many of the people whose books he delivers, and I believe completely that if we all lived as he does the world would be a greater and simpler place in which to live.

One day a friend came in to ask us if we would like a secretary if a secretary were given to us. We accepted with the quickness of genius. This was Christina. Christina was so beautiful, with her icy black hair and skin white as paper, that it made your head whirl lightly to look at her. There was no nonsense about Christina. She was going to the Washington Irving School in the mornings, working for us in the afternoons, and in the evening she ran the rooming house by which she supported her little sister and herself. But she once made a mistake. A woman had been in the shop most of the morning. She was from some middle-western city like Chicago Junction, Ohio, or Kenosha, Wisconsin. She looked at everything and we entertained her because she was enjoying metropolitan life so much. She must have looked at a tiny painting of the Isle Désirée by Herbert Crowley. She may have asked me how much it was and I may have said, "That is seventy-five."

When I went out to luncheon she was still looking around. I met my partner and Christina in the door when I came back. They were looking distractedly up and down the street. Our visitor had decided to take the little picture. She had told Christina. Everybody was busy—would Christina wrap it up?

"Did she pay you for it, Christina?" asked Mary,

coming over hastily as she saw a stranger disappearing with one of our treasures.

"Yes ma'am, she said you had told her how much it was"—and Christina opened her hand and disclosed a quarter and a half dollar.

We looked up and down the Avenue but she was irrecoverably lost in the crowd.

"I think that woman is perfectly honest," said Mary.

Yes, we both felt sure that she was perfectly honest, but where was she? She had mentioned being at some hotel but what hotel? Christina, looking stricken to earth, had an idea. She had ordered two books sent to a friend in Akron, Ohio. Couldn't we write to her friend and ask the friend for her address? When the address came back we wrote our visitor an impassioned letter. Why, yes she wrote back, she had it yet; it was kicking around in her trunk—she didn't like it much anyway. She just wanted some little souvenir.

CHAPTER VI

ALL through the first winter the shop began to get its stride. The chimes of the Metropolitan tower are associated for me with a certain breathing quick-minded encounter with new material which went with me in those days as if I had discovered a new sense. We tried all kinds of things to increase the reading of books. Our first essay was to send out monthly postal cards on the eight or ten books of the month which had interested us, with little comments of our own temper on each book. Most of the publishers assented to paying a share of the expense of these cards when their books were advertised. We kept careful records of the returns which we could trace directly to these cards, and we found in the five months in which we tried them that they paid for themselves and no more. Five months is of course not a test for any advertising policy, but they were swept away by other work that crowded over us.

The furrier from around the corner and a discreet-eyed little man with the neatest lapels who knew of one good book called *The Lunch Room*—could we tell him of any others?—set us to making libraries

for different trades. We made these "sets of ideas" to include the fifteen or twenty best books in any field. Our plan was that they could stand in some hall or locker room where all employees would pass them. We offered to go and speak on these libraries—hold up each book and tell what was to be found in it. Our problem was to get books actively at work in the world of affairs, and our theory was that people are baffled by libraries—when you are confronted by 20,000 books, you will read nothing, but if you have at hand 15 which you feel to be the best current material on any subject important to you, you will read them all. The whole pattern of democracy seems to have become too large.

We did a great deal of work on these "sets of ideas." I worked three full days on "oil in Mexico," harbor facilities, diplomatic complications, beside oil itself, for a man who was going into a big position in Tampico; and I could scarcely tear myself away from a silk library which I found in the offices of one of the trade papers—the romance of silk reads like Monte Cristo. The oil in Mexico man bought only a 15-cent pamphlet, but I made an English economist stare once by opening up a cache of information on oil in Mexico which you could hardly have expected to find in an orange and red shop. I was glad he did not try me on Honduras. We did such libraries for the silk and cotton indus-

tries of which we were in the center, for furriers, jewellers, antique furniture dealers, dressmakers, art dealers. There are such fascinating books on all these subjects that you forget that you are just glancing them over and slip down page after page through a day like an hour. I always wanted to do this widely, "wide as Neptune's plashy beach." We tried to get the dry goods stores which have classes for their clerks to put in these small units on the subjects they teach. Their theory is that when the class on lace meets they will get from the public library the books on lace; but the fact is that when the class on lace is in, the books are always out; and what knowledge might not a girl pick up in a single hour from one of those fine books of plates that would cover the cost of an armful of books? Macy's even dallied with us about such a library, but someone in an office far behind a desk decided that "We ought to be able to make it up in our own store." But of course they cannot. They have no one who is doing libraries; they are doing counters, and publicity, and the advertising man, and service. (*See Note p. 82.*)

We tried to get real estate offices to put in books, banks, cities which had a commission form of government, chambers of commerce, committees of 1000 and 100—all those occupied in affairs which had a peculiar technique and setting and history. We tried to do an Alexander Hamilton Institute for young business men in which each book should be

one not written for the trade but the leading one in its field. Gantt used to say that the two most important books on business ever written were the life of Stonewall Jackson and the Maxims of Napoleon, and we put many such a rover into our libraries.

Mrs. Stanley Resor let us do for the J. Walter Thompson Company a group of books on the psychology of color, and on the psychology of different parts of the country and different nations; and we put into it many a book that did not go there by the card; for if I were hustling the Middle West or Japan, I should rather have the *Spoon River Anthology* and Okakura Kakuza's *Book of Tea* than all the books on making advertisements and making them pay that have ever been written.

During our first year the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was carrying on an intensive campaign of selling, and Earle Cox, the young sales-manager of the New York office, put in a library for his staff—two or three new books each week—and worked out a plan for getting many of them read. His theory was that people work best and most creatively at anything if they are interested in life.

We made a citizen's library for women voters, then newly arrived in the field of politics; and one for a day nursery in London to lend to the women and children who frequented it. We did one for the social morality campaign conducted during the war by the Young Women's Christian Association.

A woman's club in Porter, Nebraska, asked us for books to study the Bible as literature. We wrote to the New York Woman's City Club and told it that it should have a few books on each of the subjects with which it was occupying itself, and we gave three cheers when it assented. We did an inordinate amount of work on this library. The best authorities passed upon the lists on town planning, child labor, public hygiene, water supply, delinquency, the Gary School, penology; and when it was done it was with occasional additions the nucleus for all future need.

Once I said to a tall, composed girl who frequented the shop, and who came from Dayton, that the Dayton Women's Club, if there was one, should have a library.

"Well, the only way they will get it is for me to put it in," she said calmly; and she did. She was Mary Patterson, daughter of a Cash Register father, and many a great and good book went into that library that I do not believe would have found its way there through a library journal.

One day somebody dropped on our table the program of the Rotary Club Convention just about to be held in St. Louis. The subject of the convention was "Craft Association." It seemed to me that craft association was probably not far off the American business man's name for the ideas of guild socialism, and I wrote to the chairman of the

program committee and told him that. When his letter came back, I took from the heading the chairmen of all the other committees listed, and sold books through them to one of the big steel companies and one of the ammunition makers.

This must not read dryly. It was bright as a fountain. As soon as you begin to regard ideas as equipment the whole face of the world changes for bookselling. We saw that people will read what is near at hand and that there should be working centers of thought at every working center of living. It was always the expeditionary thing we were trying to do—to put books where they had not been before and where they would carry work into some higher zone of thought. Our minds kept blowing fresher and fresher as we put to sea. Oh, if we could all only do all we can think! We never really did any of these things. We began each one, tested it, while we wrapped packages, delivered them, checked invoices, sold books, and tried to make the accounts balance at night. I suppose life is always like that—unfinished, all ends. You do a big thing by slow stages. What one of us did not think of the other did. I used to think of leisure in those days as you think of ice water in delirium. People told us sometimes that other stores would take our ideas. Take them by all means. I profoundly hope they will. Sometimes a great business genius will arise who will see books clearly and make them take their

place. Business is business, the grey-beards say. But it does not seem to me that business is business. It is imagination and society. All great business was built originally on a vision, as all morals are, and all taboos. Perhaps it will be a woman who will make another kind of business, closer to the fact, when women have "made room for their feet." When a thing is ready, it waits for you.

From one of all the thousands of people to whom we talked we heard of a Japanese book called "Ancient Indian Calicoes." In the days when the Japanese ports were still closed to the West and the Dutch merchants landed only at the island of Deshima once a month, they brought with them textiles from Persia, India, Ceylon, and China. The Japanese could then only weave designs in cloth—they could not print it—and their government agents made it a practice to snip off secretly for the education of their craftsmen pieces from any especially beautiful fabric. There is an old book of these filched designs, all printed wood blocks in colors. William Morris must have used it. Morris Crawford, of *Women's Wear,* told me that he had seen a copy of it in the British Museum. The blocks had long been worn out. The book had become very rare. Two years ago some public-spirited Japanese interested in the crafts issued a new edition with all the blocks cut anew. It was a king of books. I pored over it for many weeks after it came. We

sold eighteen of these books to the big silk manufacturers, a few designers and artists, almost by a scratch of the pen for each. This was one of the most grateful of our efforts to carry important material to people working away from the centers where ideas pass most current; and I know from the ease with which we sold this one book, though it was far more expensive even than most books of design, that any complete canvass of the public which plainly wants it would have made hundreds of copies accessible to people who are creating the standards of design of this country.

I always wanted to see books in the tea rooms and restaurants. Books go so well with eating. We used to go sometimes to a staid Italian table d'hôte on Thirty-third Street and somebody had left there a sugar and rice novel of the I-will-marry-you-though-our-bans-be-drenched-in-blood type. It lay on the plate rail and I never went there that someone was not reading it. I read it myself. Any book in a lending library, it is said, pays for itself four times over. I am sure many people would pay five or ten cents an evening for a good novel to read when they are dining alone, as so many do in these little places, and come back until they had finished it; and I like to think of Delmonico's with a fine set of Anatole France, and the Hardware Club with *How Germany Does Business* and *Geography and World*

Power and Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, and Æschylus and Melville.

We felt the shock of the war very intensely. A good many young men come into bookshops. Soon they began to come in from Plattsburg. One of them had not been able to lay his hand on a decent book except Beowulf and Robert Frost's poetry for six weeks. He had literally read them to pieces, he said. He was a bond salesman. All kinds of things were happening to him.

"Why, I never noticed before," he said, "that trees are different colors of green."

One morning I read coming down on the train that a young fellow had killed himself the day before in Plattsburg after bayonet practice. It was proved over and over in the Boer War that men with intellectual resources go through the extremities of campaigning which drive savages and simpler men insane. That afternoon I asked Miss Bliss if she would send a library to Plattsburg, and she said she would. We never made one up with such good hope. Three young advertising men who used to come in several times a week arm in arm in the manner of "Les Trois Mousquetaires" helped make the list, and many a frequenter of the shop had a hand in writing the eloquent critiques which we pasted on the outsides of the books as "guides to the country" to make them read. Miss Bliss' Li-

brary was in the Plattsburg Camp months before the American Library Association had its machinery moving; and Mr. James Wyer told me that he had watched the effect of the critiques we put on the covers, and that they increased the circulation of the books which had them fifty per cent over those which did not.

We made up three other camp libraries. One was given by a woman who had lost a son twenty years before. It was sent to Chillicothe. One went to Texas in response to an appeal for the men there posted on the Mexican border on lonely aqueducts and bridges, fifty miles from anywhere. A woman who overheard my partner speaking of this letter, put a bill in her hand.

"Here—send books to those boys," she said. And a banker I met one evening gave us more.

The Red Cross Headquarters in Paris wrote us that the men in France were clamoring for books to explain the world in which they found themselves—its history, resources, economic conditions, romance and art. There was always that "small remaining group" which the Y. M. C. A. discovered would not be diverted by moving pictures or Eva Tanguay. Miss Carey wrote us that one lawyer to whom she had talked, had read Winston Churchill's *The Inside of the Cup* seven times because it had been literally the only book to read within twenty miles. We made up that library on France

with the help of a professor of history at Columbia and had it off within three days after the receipt of the letter asking for it.

In the early days of the war it seemed so hard, first to credit the war, and then to understand it. It seemed outside the probabilities, and all its implications tied deep in the things one did not know. I remember how outwitted I was when I first began to hear about the Balkans and the Bagdad Railroad. Out of all that we read and heard discussed we came to regard as especially authoritative certain books on countries and issues of which little account was taken at first—Ireland, Russia, South America, the Balkans, the questions of armament and munitions manufacture, secret diplomacy, education after the war, Germany's use of thought. We made these books into a library under the caption "Understand the War—Sixteen Books." We thought everybody could read sixteen books. The war was sure to go in the end to the nation which found a way to make something out of it, once it was won, and it seems to be true that Americans are in a degree a sovereign people upon whom even the best cannot be put by authority, and that we will act only upon what we universally and as a living fact know. It is the fear and hope of bookselling that one hundred and twenty millions of people in America must have some vivid understanding of democracy, not as an echoing slogan, but as something one lives.

We had a great deal of gratuitous advertising on this library. The *New Republic* gave us a full page. We sold it to two of the great New York banks, two government bureaus in Washington, two New York settlements, several offices, and a number of individuals. It was problematic to advertise because we could not mention titles. If we did, people ordered them from Brentano's. I was asked to write a Japanese merchant about it who was in New York on business; and when he did not respond, I was asked to call him up.

"Yes, that was an excellent list," he said. "I told my secretary to order all those books."

[NOTE.—Like so many of the impressions which we take at random and circulate blithely as of our own knowledge, the criticism of Macy's on page 73 is ill-advised, and I hereby withdraw it as being found on better information inexact.]

CHAPTER VII

ONCE a man came to see us from the Department of Commerce to ask us what our advertising policy was. What was our advertising policy? We never did but one piece of paid press advertising. That was a week after the shop opened. The National Convention of Women's Clubs came off in New York, and it seemed a remarkable coincidence. In something of a flutter we took four lines in the Convention Bulletin. Two women came in response to it and said, "What a nice little place." All the rest of the publicity we had in four years came our way because the press wanted what the shop wanted to say. Advertising managers called us up sometimes and said they had a little open space—could we use it? Christopher Morley, when he was adorning the *Ladies Home Journal,* let us make lists in the Christmas number—books to send to your friend interested in her home, to one interested in the theatre, to one with a sixteen-year old boy or girl, to a rich friend, to a poor one. He gave us a full page, with pictures and little pot-pourri stories of how our noses were broken playing basket ball, and where we were educated; and he even sent us the "customary

honorarium" for this vast piece of publicity for which pump companies pay thousands a page.

We used to find ourselves in the most extraordinary places. The interest of the public in bookshops is inexhaustible. People who never would stay in the same room alone with a book have bookshops in their minds as one of the settings of romance. The Mexico City *Press* wrote us up; the Calcutta *Observer; America,* the Jesuit organ; we appeared in *The Holy Cross Magazine* beside remarks on the apostolic year. High-school classes were brought to visit us, and flocks from the library schools. Doctors and psychoanalysts asked us to take their patients as assistants. John Emerson put us in the moving pictures. The street was cleared as if for the Red Cross parade. The heroine descended from her car and entered. The villain followed. The hero stole to the window and clenched his fist. The sign swung gently and carried the name on it to Miss Constance Talmadge's entire bodyguard of admirers—how strong is it, ninety millions or more?

What was the reason? The chief factor in making a thing known, outside of the forced methods of advertising, seems to be to make it honest in the best sense—something of your own, and alive, and not drawn from the general vat of all experience. Only give the world something with character to talk about, and it will carry your name to the sunset.

Mary Elizabeth's candy is not so different from any other candy. It is the cachet of an imaginative personality sensitive to color and decoration that sells it. Nothing succeeds like excess. The sale of thousands of books strayed into our shop because we wrapped them in curious brilliant packages. We did it because we liked doing it. Some artists who worked on the designs made them so deliriously lovely that it was difficult to make up one's mind ever to open them. A sick man to whom five were sent in New Mexico sent them all back to his wife in Boston to see before they were unwrapped. Sometimes when you asked an artist to wrap a book he was very languid in his assent; and then he would get interested. It was a new medium. Late at night in the Christmas season we would draw the big table out in the hall where it was warmer, and wrap packages, never two the same—whole sets of Dunsany—whole sets of Tagore. The broadsides which we sent out about Thanksgiving were our only self-projected advertising. They were the recapitulation of our idea, our peculiar claim, and how we had realized it during the year. The shop drew its vitality from and made its accounting to those who went in and out of it.

A man who had once been in love with one of our mothers one day came in to look us over. He had become a millionaire—such luck! He had made money as a manufacturing chemist; he was of the

two biggest manufacturing chemists in the world. He did not know anything about chemistry. He hired chemists to do that. He had made money by selling ideas. He was very nice—kind and so comfortable; and he used to give us the most delicious luncheons at the Canadian Club—very grateful to a harassed bookseller.

In the first place he had not been able to find us. He had walked two or three times by the shop before he saw it, since the orange paint was then at the end of its season. It was not the kind of thing that he noticed at all.

When he came in he listened to it all appreciatively.

"Well now, girls," he said, "that's fine. Are you making any money?"

We said, why no, we weren't making much money—we were probably losing some.

"Well, don't you *want* to make money?" he inquired with a rising inflection.

We said, why yes, we'd like to make a little money of course, if we could.

"Well, there's something the matter," he said. "Can you sell books? Now sell me this book and let me see if it's that."

My partner sold him four books.

"No, that's all right. You can sell books. I'm sold on those," he said. "It's because you don't have people coming in here. There's nobody here. Peo-

ple don't know about you. You have to get them in here."

We said yes, we had always thought that. When people came, they almost always bought books and they almost always came again, and so we thought it would build up in time.

He shook his head. "That's too slow," he said. "The only reason you aren't making money here is because you aren't advertising. Let's see your literature."

We brought out all our broadsides and announcements of publications. He looked them all over.

"Yes, those are nice," he said, "but throw them all away. They won't sell anything. You've got to hit 'em in the eye. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'm not very busy just now and I like this idea of you girls. It ought to appeal to doctors. I can sell my doctors anything I tell them to buy. Now, I'll take this stuff of yours, and if you will let me do it entirely in my own way, I'll look it through and pick out what I can use and send out a postal card to ten thousand doctors for a start. Then in a month we will see what we will do next."

We were a little fearful about what he might do, but we said yes gratefully, to call on us for any information.

"I don't want any information," he said. "I know advertising and I know my doctors. I'm not going

to sell any of your books. I'm going to sell your idea."

He went away with it. After two weeks he came back looking rather subdued.

"I've been working on that idea of yours," he said. "I don't quite get it. Books are different. Now, when you want an automobile, you want it for one thing, but you want books for a good many different things. I'd like to have you write out something you think would do for doctors, and then I'll see what I can do with it."

So Mary wrote something. He liked especially the phrase "meeting place of the right man and the right book." He sent out five thousand cards. We never learned that a single person came in from them.

When we were working on our war library we managed to realize one idea among the many at which we only glanced and filed for reference. Fifth Avenue was sumptuous with banners that spring and summer. We made a very beautiful great starch blue one with our seal and the address of the shop and "Understand the War—Sixteen Books" stitched on it in orange and dark blue and white. We hung it out over the avenue from the stock room window one morning in a good sailing breeze. It stood out against the sky for blocks up and down the avenue, rolling its great carven folds upon the bright air. To our horror we heard during the day that the

Fifth Avenue Association had secured a ruling from the Board of Aldermen months before that no advertising should extend more than a certain number of feet over the avenue, that our banner was out too far, and that the Association was going to enforce this ruling in the case of our banner. We had never heard of the Fifth Avenue Association. We had died a hundred thousand deaths creating our masterpiece and we went into action at once. The invaluable antique store man found out for us who were on the signs committee of the Fifth Avenue Association. The chairman was a haberdasher in the next block. He received me with a quiet bow and told me that the Committee on Signs had held a session on our banner during the morning. I skipped a breath. It had voted that this was the kind of advertising the Avenue wanted, he said, and that it was to remain up.

The three Knights of the Brilliant Pencil, who appeared in the door of the shop so regularly three or four times a week, had become one of its institutions by the time America entered the war. I do not know whether they were always completely sober. But they were always so funny that we gave up the time of their visits mostly to laughing at them. One was pale and golden haired, seeming to be made of ivory and fine gold, very vibrant, somehow touching, and only funny once in two hours and then with a touch of salt like Lytton Strachey, as if someone

had suddenly remembered to pass the olives. His father was a commodore and when America entered the war he enlisted in the Navy and used to come in in his midshipman's clothes looking like a doll in a box. The one who usually walked in the middle was always very clean, as if he were about to be married, and he had a way of looking about the room humorously when he came in, as if he expected to find a joke under a table or chair. He was always trying to devise ways of getting books home without having to make explanations to his wife. Wives are the enemies of booksellers. They are always thinking about the milk bill. He melted away at once into the aviation corps.

The third was the funniest. He was a lord full fat and in good point. He looked as healthy as a lamppost. When we went into the war, he began to volunteer. He tried everything. He even strung a train of wires into the commissary department. He would come in alternately "emitting rays" and then bathed in gloom. He had never been sick with anything except sunburn in his life, but it appeared that he had a heart that did not compensate, and defective vision. He learned all the opticians' cards. They always brought out a new one. One day he came in radiant. He had been accepted.

"In what department, merry sir?" I asked.

"In the department known as the draft," he said.

He had an adoring maiden aunt who wanted to give him a Bible to take with him. She came to see us about it. He would take one, he had said, if he could have one that did not look "like a hearse or a coffin." We engaged to do one that did not. It seems strange when you begin to think of it with a fresh feeling of inquiry how the Puritans have penalized the Bible through all these generations. We did an orange one as rich as we could find a dyer to mix the color, with a vine from Blake's *Heaven and Hell* adapted for the tooling, and instead of a title the line from Jeremiah, "Thy Words Were Found and I Did Eat Them." His aunt was so pleased that she had a prayer book done for him, and she was on the way to have the hymnal and concordance and *Lives of the Saints* when he sailed. We did these Bibles all through the war and they must have done their part to carry the memory that there was such a thing as beauty into the khaki-colored and regimentized world into which men went.

Once beside the one we sent to Chillicothe, we did a memorial library. It was in memory of a woman who had lived for fifty years and died in a young Nebraska town; and it was intended to keep vigorous the idealism of youth which she had long nourished there. She had groped in almost entire darkness. Her only gospel had been that life was something more than they knew in that little plank town with the tumble weeds rolled up against a station—

go and find it. She had been a power with young men and women, and we put in the Martha Rowell library, books for youth—the lives of Elizabeth Blackwell and Pasteur and Huxley and Benvenuto Cellini and J. J. Hill; Rahel Varnhagen, and Slosson's *Creative Chemistry,* and Mr. Deland's *Imagination in Business,* and Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age* and Ewald's *My Little Boy.* I do not know why people do not give such memorial libraries often to carry on the power of a strong vanished spirit—to the public wards of hospitals, to city jails, to rest rooms for employees, and wherever the handicapped and bewildered and inept may draw from them the power to live which is in books. I think it is because they do not believe in their booksellers.

It is so hard to make a story like this true. To get it outside one's temperament and romanticism, and show the balance of wonder and failure which goes into any living piece of work, is the miracle; and truth is always so much more interesting than fiction. The reality has always turned out to be so much more interesting than the mist thing, the vision, to me. We were a little two-penny shop which the big fellows hardly knew was there, egotistic, contentious, personal, its machinery none too competent, its tastes so catholic that it had no principles. We saw it all as story. We were inclined to figure all our affairs as larger than life. Sometimes

I felt that we were only flirting with our idea, staging it like a concert. But it had from the first hour something in it which was independent of ourselves—something true. Each year was different from the last; certain factors of our thesis came at times into sharp outline and others receded and then came forward again in minuet-like rhythm. But we sold books always for the love of God, like the men who worked on the great cathedrals.

How did we read all that we did read? When interesting books are passing before you all the time, it is amazing how many you manage to put behind you. As a matter of fact there are not more than four or five good books a month. There was little good which came along which one of us did not read. We read going down in the morning and with books propped up before us at luncheon and on the way home at night, and sometimes I tried to make myself small and invisible behind bookcases or hide myself among the stacks of the stock room, when the spell of some last pages was over me, and read until I was hunted down. I have always loved stories where people are cast on desert islands or lost in jungles, or marry and learn to love afterward. From my earliest youth, when I read them dangling on the limb of a tree, I have had an unappeased appetite for such tales for reasons which a psychoanalyst could probably explain to me with dreadful clarity—and when I had one of these or a

good biography, a customer was weight and dust to me.

It soon became evident that the staple of the shop was talk. It was half the merchandise taken in and half the merchandise going out. I am always afraid of talk and charm. You can talk anything into prestige. The talker rules the world. We often warmed ourselves by it, and made ourselves believe that what was not so, was so. But it turned out to be the way we learned, the real mill of the gods for us. And I must defend it for its pleasantness. The low murmur of talk in a bookshop is one of the most pleasant things in the world. It must not crash about. Speak low in bookshops and love. But if a community is to send its blood through you, if people were to make the shop, we could not choose times and seasons. We believed that if we lost that connection we should lose something that we could not replace with any efficiency. So we leaned our elbows on the tables and talked and listened while the morning mail sometimes waited unopened, and month by month we learned more that we needed to know.

One July morning the Russell Sage Foundation library called us up to ask if we had a copy of the Fisher bill.* We had been trying to get copies of the Fisher bill for months, but communication was

*Famous bill on education passed through the efforts of the British labor party during the war.

difficult in those days, and we had never been able to find anybody to take the time to fill even such a simple, straightforward order. I did not know any way we could get a copy of the Fisher bill, but I was true to form and I told the librarian that I would send her one if I could find one. As I sat down to my letters again a small blonde man with a weak little Master Shallow beard presented himself in the door. He informed me that he was a poet and dropped a volume of his work on the table. It was one of those smoking July days when the sun looks down from its "brazen tower" without a single glance aside. It seemed to me that I could not do a poet that morning. I could almost have "set up a howl." But he was a wistful person. I saw in a few moments that he was a very real one. We talked awhile about art and immortality and "nature and Hegel," and then he asked me if we kept the Porter Sargent handbooks. Porter Sargent was one of his friends, and his face brightened a little at mentioning his friend in a way that added to the natural pride of the bookseller at turning and plucking off the shelf behind me a little-known book. I explained to him that we kept it not for the directory but for the preliminary editorial matter which included a great deal that, though we had only glanced it through, we could see was nowhere else available.

"Yes," he said, "there is an excellent digest of the

Fisher bill, and I have not been able to get anywhere else exactly the provisions of the Fisher bill."

Within an hour of the time that the Russell Sage librarian had called me up I called her back and told her that I had the material for her that she wanted.

All kinds of strange and fugitive things came in and out of our starch blue door through what we talked about. One woman brought a collection of bitten patterns from the western Indians. It seems that as they sit around the camp fire they bite patterns in pieces of birch bark for favors to friends. You hold them up to the fire to see them. Some of those she brought were as exquisite as pieces of thirteenth century detail. Two front teeth and all the rest out, she said, were the best equipment for bitten work, and an old woman over ninety years old had done the finest example of this art, dying almost without being known to us, the conquerors.

CHAPTER VIII

ANYTHING may happen in a bookshop where the "game of life is freely played." One wintry day it was, late in the afternoon, when a man with very kind brown eyes came in as I was putting back on the shelves the books that had been pulled out during the day. The streets were full of snow and the sound of a muted distant world. The shop was always especially charming in the snow, with pink summer flooding from all its twinkling windows in fifty shining glows. Our visitor had a particularly definite air of his head being screwed on extremely tight; but he was one of those people quick to admire, who lends his ear to an observation, like Hazlitt's listener, "as if you had brought him a piece of news," who always makes one bring out all one's best wares. He stayed a long time. I must have told him a great many things. Among others I must have told him how necessary it is that such a shop should be able to give books away. Drab little girls and hungry-eyed artists handle books so wistfully sometimes in a book shop. He went off about eight. Peasants have stories of the unknown guest who fills a room with light, and as I piled up the nickels

and quarters and nibbled my pencil over the balance, the room seemed brighter than usual as if a beautiful personality had left some immortal gentleness behind it. He came back the next morning and gave us a fund for giving books away. Ah me, that fund! It was the great romance of the shop. We gave books to a colored porter who came in several times on Saturday nights and bought ten dollars' worth at a go of books recommended by *The Nation*. We gave them to a boy who was stealing them from us, and to a crippled young artist—a girl with brave, clear brown eyes which looked straight into yours like a Hals portrait. She asked me one day if I would look at her drawings sometime. "I have them with me," she said, when I said I would. She produced a portfolio from under a cape, and they were illustrations of Tcheckov, so interesting that I know she is one of those who is going to determine what we feel in America in the next twenty years. We sent books to the I.W.W. who were awaiting trial in Chicago —all the best books on the labor movement in England and France, because it had seemed to us that the American labor movement had a program rather than a philosophy, and a period of depression is a time for taking stock. More than all else we gave them to just nobody at all, people who lingered over them and laid them down hesitatingly as they remembered something with a sigh.

When Christopher Morley gave us an audience of a million to listen to what we thought they should read, we had a letter from a woman in Kansas. It came during the following spring. She asked if we could tell her of any book on "practical education."

"I am forty years old," she said "and very ignorant." She said that she had a boy who could write poetry pretty well, "but he can not spell much better than I can."

We wrote her what we knew about education—that you seem to have to begin it at the point nearest at hand and go on wherever you can get a footing, and we sent her a list of books for them both. A letter came back at once. If the corn crop was good, she was going to have all those books, she said. The corn crop was apparently not good, so at Christmas we packed them up and sent them to her. They arrived the day before Christmas and the post office telephoned her that they were there. She made us see, as if it were Thirty-Second Street, Henry starting away in the blizzard for the package, the wind-shaken prairie horse, Chauncey and herself making popcorn balls. They were in the wheat belt; on clear days you could see the nearest ranch house twenty miles away. They were paying "a fabulious price for cattle. They had two failiers in their amediate neighborhood that year." She asked us to come and visit them and see how

"farmers farm." The good St. Max sent them books twice a year.

Quiet, knowing, young Jewish girls with intelligent eyes and pretty dresses, the kind who, as Kedansky says, have "contributed so much to the education of slum students and settlement workers," came in at times from the neighboring loft buildings —workers in the clothing trades. A girl of this kind bought a volume of Kurpin's short stories from me one day and Hobson's *Democracy After the War*. She was hesitating over something else.

"No, I must not take it this month," she said laying it down at length.

I could not quite place her; I knew that I had talked to her several times.

"Do please have it," I said. "We are able to give people books who should have them."

She looked startled. Oh, no, she could not do that, she said. When she charged her two books, it was a name which Wall Street does not confuse with that of a little Yiddish garment worker and one of our best accounts.

At the end of four years we had branches in Detroit, in the Neighborhood Playhouse, and the Theatre Guild. We had sold books at garden lectures at the Colony Club, at the Socialist and Civil Liberties Conventions, at the International Conference of Women Physicians. Quite naturally, from all the currents that flowed in and out of the shop

we came to have something happening every Tuesday evening. We had opened with a reading of Dreiser's plays. There had been poetry lectures and a series on libertarian education, a debate between a theoretical pacifist and a young Frenchman who had been fighting. Once it was a series on Spanish mimes and coplas; and once Amy Lowell, as the foremost exponent of verse libre, and an English musician with interesting theories of rhythm, debated rhythm for three hours. The room would grow colder and colder, and people would stay on and on.

We had published five poetry broadsides and three books, and imported three from England as the American publishers. We had done hundreds of special bindings. We had sold the work of several young unknown painters, entered their work in shows, and found critics to write upon it. We were selling a Punch and Judy show, an especially clever marionette, batiks, and little cartons of some Hesperian honey, the like of which was never seen on land or sea. Mrs. Taylor brought in the honey the first week after the shop opened, when we were too busy almost to be amused. But they were so amusing that as they lay on the window neglected, people were always trying to buy them from us because their mothers were sick or some other authentic reason. We had not intended to sell

honey, but Clara Taylor had a carload to sell for a friend in Dakota.

"We can sell the whole carload for you," we told her, and we did.

Batik was an experimental process in those days, for occidental artists; and a few men and women driven home from Paris by the war had brought it with them. We gambled in hangings for our own shop and it made us blink to find ourselves selling batiks. We had a story of them called *"The Bride and the Batik."* A little bride from Winesburg, Ohio, came in once and bought a batik sofa cushion cover for thirty-five dollars. She had never before bought a sofa cushion cover for more than a dollar and thirty-five cents, but this was a celebration—the grand shudder. The people that made them always told us that they would wash like a glove, and it sounded interesting, so I told her that. After about a year a friend of hers came in looking very stern. The bride had washed her sofa cushion cover expecting it to act like a glove, and instead it had faded. It all ran together, the friend said. I told her to bring it back. I knew the woman who had done it would make it right. So the friend brought it back. It had been pretty hot, Tangier squeezed straight out of the tube. It did not look at all like Tangier when she pulled it out of her handbag.

"Why, but it's lovely," I said, "far lovelier than

it was before. They keep rugs and tramp on them for years in peasant huts to make them look like this," I said.

The friend looked at it a little startled.

"Why, it is lovely, isn't it?" she said. She returned it to her handbag thoughtfully, and we never heard from the bride again.

I do not know how we happened to sell all these things we had not thought of selling. Neither of us could ever think of ourselves in an air-tight compartment where nothing came near except the thing you were doing.

When we had been open about three months a man from Bradstreet's came in to see us. He came for data to list our financial status. I told him that I did not know what our financial status was, that I tried not to think of it, that we had an idea and were trying to realize it. But he had others behind him who would not let him rest on that and he was persistent. Just before Christmas, when he reappeared, I told him that I expected to cast a balance of our liabilities and assets within the next two months, and if he would come in the first of March I would give him some figures. He seemed to think when he came that things were not so bad. He said as he pushed away my papers and snapped up his manuscript case that it seemed interesting to him and sound. It was clear that it was interesting to him—that he saw it clearly.

"Yes, that's so. Yes, that's so," he kept saying, and it seemed worth while to make him really try to understand.

"But aren't you afraid to take so many things on?" he asked at length.

No, I told him, we were afraid to let anything go away.

The mail was a bag of dreams brought in to us four times daily from the great round world. If life should ever seem too large an order to fill, if I should hear that Mr. Strachey was going to write my biography, or the Macmillan bill should get so big that I could not go on thinking about it, I should never step off until after the morning mail was in. We used to scramble a little politely for the opening of it. It brought us boxes of strange and beautiful sea things from a man in Honolulu to whom we had written a sharp letter about a bill, and who became one of our firm friends.

Once there was a box of oranges from California and once the rubbing of an altar stone and queer fans and combs from Japan. Oranges and orange blossoms dominated a March day. Their scent filled the room and Brown arranged them on the stairs in a kind of magnificent Della Robbia garland and even let them down on strings in front of the nose when one was doing one's elegant by some familiar customer; and I remember that all day I felt as if I must rush out the door and run up

the gangplank of one of the United Fruit Company steamers and sail away. It was always an emotion too as the shop grew larger to see how many checks came in.

DEAR MADAM:—

Unfortunately I had a very big pain to read your name and address but I am much interest in the so interesting book of Dr. Pellew—Dyes and Dying. I take the liberty to ask you. Do you know any place or where, I can buy the object tjanting he mention. Efficiently I am in a very big hurry and enclose $3.58 the total tjanting price of the expedition. Probably you will be able to hand me the desired object.

Respectfully yours,

.....

Guayaquil, South America.

DEAR MADAMES:—

Your November announcement has been sent to me from the states. Send me some books. I am thirty miles back in the jungle up the muddiest mule team in the world. I like such writers as Conrad and Elinor Glyn but do not object to something lighter.

Somewhere in Connecticut,
May 30, 1917.

DEAR MAGIC:—

Many thanks for yours. Decide about the price of the drawing yourself. My opinion is if it is a man who wants it perhaps—$75. Woman —$35. Beautiful woman $25. Beautiful woman with a soul—$15. Beautiful woman with a soul

and grey eyes—give it to her. I have rented my last house today—the one in the Lilac Tree. Wrenski called this morning. He said he liked the place quite well last year but finds it terribly out of repair now. So we went out and had a look at it. The wind had certainly played the dickens with the floor of the nursery and all the windows were broken save one. So I have agreed to his requirements and shall whitewash and rehair the whole place tomorrow. He kicked at the price—Incessant Song and Happiness—I told him how everything had gone up—he said—"Don't—ter-wit-tum-care" but he agreed after much haggling. I said "How's your wife?"

He said, "Which one?" without a blush.

I said, "Last year's!"

He said, "She wuz—a terror—I-ter-wit-ter-vorced her."

Next time I will write you what the forget-me-not said to the wren's breast feather one spring morning. I am doing fire flowers and gold birds.

Toujours a toi,

PADDY

DEAR SUNWISE ONE:—

. . . I have a working room of the kind that William Morris liked where you eat in one corner, sleep in another, and read in another. It has been so cold lately that I have had to keep all to one corner to go on existing. I love the firewatch. In the early dawn, the moon gets behind my big tree and makes things look like Tristan and Isolde, and I have the pale blue window pane and the pool of fire light in the purple mahogany dresser I bought for seventy-five cents

and sold Elizabeth for Five dollars—so it really isn't mine any more only I have it.

"The wheel that beareth the stars" has revolved over my head twenty-eight times since It all happened. Life never ceases to have the juicy bite of a winter apple only sometimes it is the cheek that has been turned toward the sun and just now it's the other one. But there's always a grey house with a roof all its own, a hickory log for the fire, and a cupboard that never fails to produce a bone for a certain happy rascal. Have you any books on sharp sweet love?

FRANCIS

Free Public Library of
Newark, N. J.

DEAR MESDAMES:—

I have your circular issued in November about your bookshop and I take this occasion to assure you of my very great interest in your well considered enterprise. I have long been of the opinion that this country would never have an adequate number of book stores until the publishers were more open minded in their dealings with booksellers. You seem to have been able to surmount this handicap and you are to be congratulated

Yours very truly,
JOHN COTTON DANA

I do not know just when or how we began our epistolatory friendship with that gay spirit, Mr. Meredith Janvier, of Baltimore. Mr. Janvier may be 24 or 70; he may believe in English rule in

Ireland and be a person who cuts down trees. But we seized a letter with his imprint on the envelope as if it were a new novel by Sir Harry Johnston, and we kept them in a file of their own for the diversion of tea parties in the gallery. One day when I went to the file to add one just arrived, they were all gone. Somebody had liked them too well. I once heard a speaker adjured to speak louder.

"And funnier" added several voices from the back. It is a pity to show Mr. Janvier not at his best when his best is so good, but I cannot leave him unquoted.

> Dear Mesdames and Monsieur:—
> I am sending you $$$ for the "Lay Anthony." Shoot me along another and send bill. A modern bookshop is all right but you gottagetcher money just the same. Plenty business. Beau- coup- d- argent.
>
> Toujour,
> Meredith Janvier

Books! Do I make too much of them? They knock at the future. They are so various. If a man does not like Hamlet, he may like the *Life of Pasteur* or *Simple Souls.* I recommend them both. Books can be used for anything. Campbell, the poet, used them for razor papers. They give us motives, possibilities, tests, tastes. Thought is in

them upon which modern life is founded, by which it is adorned, "our real fortune, our pride." When a man has emptied his purse into his head, he has it, as Franklin said, in a good place. Francis Place, the great chartist tailor, tells us in his letters of the debating club to which he belonged as a young man. It was valuable, he said, for this, that it made a man read books and the reading of books teaches a man to use his powers; and he cites as evidences that every man who belonged to that club became a master. In Russia they are giving books away as we give education and parks; and I suppose a time will come when a truancy officer will call and report us if we do not read a book a week. Such power of life and joy is in them! I salute you, great parent. "Your influence flows in me unbrokenly in a thousand streams." One cannot say it—the joy of books. I have heard people suggest that Turgenev and Tchekhov are depressing, but when I go along the street with a new volume of either under my arm I feel them like warm gold and know that I need only an hour's reprieve and a low chair to go into some nobler air. It is as if they touched me on the arm and said, "Look!" I can even read them standing if necessary. They are life tamed—everything thrown into bolder relief.

CHAPTER IX

CHRISTMAS in a bookshop is one of the break-neck experiences. A nice, peaceful matter like a war is something that happens to most people somewhere off in a page of print. It is different when you put it in an 18×35 room. At midnight on Christmas eve the first year a large order came by telephone, if we could send it. Lucille Deming, who was drooping over a folio on Moorish architecture, looking like a Renaissance medal, offered to drop it at the address on Fifth Avenue if we would put her on the bus with it. I humbly commended her to God as the conductor lifted the package on, and when I went back my partner was still selling books.

One year a large English order which we had been awaiting for two months came in during the afternoon of the twenty-third. When all the charge slips were filed, the replacements made, the shelves in order, that night at one, in the vast middle of the night, we opened those packages. They were things we had long wanted to see, and we visited with those books until toward morning. I never enjoyed a package of books more. The third year

we lost our hold upon our destiny entirely about four in the afternoon of the twenty-third. We piled up stacks upon stacks of orders—on the hall floor, in the windows, along the walls. A Harvard man from a neighboring real estate office had come in with a group of friends. We were all busy. He began to sell them books himself. A salesbook was thrust into his hand. He established a little bazaar of his own on one corner. An old lady liked one of our decorated packages but the title tag was lost and she yearned to know whether Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* in the children's edition or the Interchurch report of the Steel Strike was in it. But he was firm with her. "I sold it to her," he whispered as he dipped up change.

Helen Arthur came in about six o'clock, considered us with her kind competent eyes, and suggested that the best Christmas present she could give us would be a taxi to deliver books. Somebody always stirs the pudding. We closed promptly and began to wrap packages at once. Mr. Huebsch stopped in about eight and put on labels. Mrs. Niles offered to go out with the taxi. We called it at nine. We set the shop to rights and made the replacements. My partner wrapped herself in a big sweater and cleaned the sidewalk because we knew there would be no time for it in the morning. It was nearly two when we came down from the stockroom with Brahday, the German bookkeeper

dancing along the avenue in front of us with a lighted candle. We went home with the spotless wedding garment feeling that we were entirely ready for anything, however thick. All through the next day we sat in our swept and garnished little shop, waiting for things that never happened and people that never came. It rained, and everybody who was going to give Uncle Timothy a book decided on that Maori war hatchet instead that Jamey brought from Melbourne.

All the quiet aspiration of the shop is lost. It becomes a tempest of flying five and ten dollar bills, checks, paper, cord, and banks of increasing books. But as one catches a broken breath and regards one's complexion on Christmas morning, one seems to be a part of ten thousand Christmases as one never has been before. All the world in which one thinks is thrown into a larger pattern by business, corrupt as it is; and the experience of work sustained and extreme, uncontrollable, pouring upon you from some irrestible source, so that you throw off yourself, is a curious value and posession unlike anything in personal life. Even the size of my check book, and to get seven thousand stamps at a buy was education. I had never seen so many stamps at once before.

Customers are the cream of the vintage. People were half our merchandise and that is the truth. It can not be otherwise. A bookshop is "dug out

of humanity," like Rembrandt's portraits. It is hard to get at the important people of the world. Rolland points out that in sixty years Pasteur never went to the theatre. Ryder was not a man you would find on a satin sofa. But they go to bookshops. And sometimes I think the uninteresting people are as interesting as the interesting ones. Most of the people we know are just like ourselves. They wear the same woolen embroidered blouses with no shoulder seams, or midnight *peau de soie* silk with muslin ruches. They keep the same number of maids or have a charwoman polish off the studio twice a week. They have gone to college if we have, and to Europe the same number of times. If they have done Greece, we have done it. But in a bookshop you drink democracy. People not selected by your own personality come into a shop —all sorts, the great, and cold, young ex-convicts, shoplifters. I never really had all the people I wanted until I had a shop. It used to seem to me that if we ever came to the point where we were so expert that we worked behind three office boys, or desks with our names in mahogany frames at the end of them, we should lose something we could not replace with any efficiency. You can never be exclusive without excluding something.

I do not wish to be a special pleader. Jay Gould used to say that when he was in a Republican district, he was Republican; and when he was in a

Democratic one, he was Democratic; and if it was doubtful, he was doubtful; and when it was going mugwump, he was mugwump; but he was always an Erie railroad man. It is hard to believe that women have any fundamental difference of approach in business from men. We inherit from our fathers too. But if "nature has kept them nearer the plant," if they bring into the world of affairs a reverence for the moment and think of the small and feeble as beings important as the mature and great, they will free the world from its giddiest waste. I liked it that the shop was so human that a woman who came to buy a book went away with an Airedale puppy, and that babies came sometimes and sometimes they cried as if the world were nothing but a hole into which you shout what you want and keep shouting. Once four of our best customers discussed for half an hour the best way to stuff a turkey. They each maintained violently that chestnuts, onions, and tomatoes, and truffles in the Italian way, oysters, or a powdered dressing with sage and bay, was the one and only canonical way to stuff a turkey, and they cast aside the arts, history, philosophy, and economics. while they challenged the field. I liked it and it makes people read and buy good books.

The only way we get at other human beings is through ideas, and where ideas are current something unlocks the breast. Standing by the table one

brilliant August morning a woman told me, quite suddenly—because I said that his book seemed to me a long compensatory act in which he had tried to live all that he could not wring from reality—quite suddenly, she told me a story of love between herself and a great man solitary as a star, a story of such rich beauty and passion that the walls seemed to fall away and only it remained. She stared upon me strangely when she had finished and sank into a chair gazing out upon the clear summer street and forgot me.

Once at one of the big Authors' League dinners I found myself placed between Laura Jean Libbey and a man who did not offer his name. His card had been pushed away among the forks and spoons on the other side of his plate and I devoted myself to Miss Libbey. She was in a white Spanish lace dress and large lace hat and wore diamonds like lima beans. She was plainly one of the kindest human beings to whom I had ever sat so near; she called me "my dear" at once and told me in the most generous spirit possible how to be a success at writing. You make a success at writing by hitting 'em in the eye a number of times. You keep hitting 'em in the eye and after awhile they say "What's this?" Write a great many things.

The man on the other side did not volunteer me any information about himself and he did not seem to feel that which I volunteered about myself to

be of any critical importance. He glanced me over briefly every time that I returned to the charge, as if he decided that I would hardly do, and gave himself absently to his thoughts. You go to a dinner party to be amused and must talk to the people next you or go home, so we tried at intervals to get on but it was like climbing up too steep a stair. We bade each other good night with a lack of enthusiasm clear as a diamond. After the shop opened he came in one day and stayed for two hours, and if he had stayed until nine I should have sworn that he talked above singing. It was James Branch Cabell.

Customers have some bad crimps. All who want to browse around are suspect to me. We always felt grateful to any who wanted to snoop or nose or even give a whirl around. This phrase has fallen from Bridget Elia's quiet fame upon the whole quasi-intellectual race of cities and they use it with an air of its being a sort of freedom of the city to having read Hazlitt and *Cymbeline*. Why do they say too that they will not buy a book because they do not want to keep it? Books are not to keep. They are part of the arterial nourishing movement of life. Sometimes they are social persiflage. You do not keep that lift of Kreisler's bow as he plays the last note, or tea at the Plaza, or a bunch of blue and red California poppies with their furry buds. And why do they say that they

will not give a child a book because he will not take care of it? Books are not to be taken care of. A book is a tool of life. A thinker may even take parts of it out if he needs them and carry them about in his pocket. A child must communicate with a book as he can—have it to live on the floor with him. In all the complexity of things that he must learn to value and conserve, surely he will not learn the power of books by being exiled from them because he tears a sheet of paper. Boys and girls used to spend whole mornings sometimes looking along the shelves investing in a birthday or graduation present. They bought so many things for which I was sure they would not care later. But what they learned! I sometimes think that a better inheritance could not be left to a child than ten dollars a month to spend in a bookstore.

I made a collection of several thousand customers —a kind of museum of portraits and attributes and personality. There was the large quivering lady veiled in spangled gauze, with a large picture hat and a flowered veil, and smelling of patchouli, who wanted something for readings—nothing depressing—"I demand ecstasy. Life is pure ecstasy to me," she said. "That is the way I see it."

I asked her, "Madame, have you cast your eye on the map of Europe lately?" But no accident of diplomacy could impair that full-bosomed middle-aged youth. She was warm and kind. I saw why

a distinguished poet made her the comrade of his maturity. An old editor going blind used to come, and a priest with voluminous robes and a large silver cross; and there was a machinist in a black sateen shirt, with knuckles dark with oil, who wanted books that would help him to be a master. One spring evening a man made a clean sweep of a whole table of books on the Irish question—58 of them. He had been in South America on a mining concession for three years. He was a young Irish contractor, the kind of a man that likes good plumbing and puts his hat on the back of his head because it gives him confidence. But he had known MacDonagh and Pearse and Casement well and he was famished for the whole story.

There was the young fellow who let us select a book for him every Saturday to read on Sunday. He stayed in bed all day on Sunday and read. I began him one week on *Jean Christophe*. I began him on the second volume because I think that is the way to read these three-decker novels as you make a friend and then go back after awhile and hear about his childhood. You do not begin with everybody the day he was born. Our young man rose to this idea. He came back on Monday filled with a burning zeal for the next installment and went off on Saturday with it under his arm and the look of a Christmas tree. But oh, how darkly he looked at poor me on Monday morning. On

Sunday morning he had had his breakfast. He had read his paper. He had stretched out his hand at last in a luxury of content for his book and six solid hours of reading, and when he opened the package, he wanted to drink my blood—it was the same volume he had the Sunday before!

There was that duchess of Park Avenue dressed to the lines who wanted graduation presents for her daughter's classmates at Vassar. There were to be five and she was eager not to show any favoritism. The first five we selected were too small, the second five were too large. My partner's eyebrows went to a little peak. The next five were too much alike. The next were too different. The others as we piled them up did not seem enough; they were too pretentious; they were all poetry; not all poetry. The woman's cheeks became a consumptive stain and her eyes appeared to have come off a card of buttons. She went away leaving piles of five along all one corner of the room and saying that she would have to get collars after all. She was entirely incapable of making up her mind and if I could have been firm with her for a single moment she would have been grateful to me to the depths of her waxen bones.

There were the young things, probably not all the moral code would wish, wanting a "problem" story, and the circus man who wanted reading for his son—however he may have heard of us, and

the lad who came in one morning and seemed familiar. "Don't you remember? Sing Sing," he said, and then I saw that he was the boy who had showed us around the day we went up there when "Tom came back." He was just out that morning.

There was the little girl who kept teasing for books until her mother said firmly, "Anne, I have told you once—you can have three books and no more."

"Mother can have nine books and I can only have three," remarked Anne, while they were being wrapped up, as if she were simply calling attention to the distinction.

One Monday morning just after the commuters' trains began to come in, an exhilarated young man ordered *Some One Like You* and *The Things He Said to Her*. There are such books, and I sent them off to Mrs. Eustacia Gordon with a vision of a villa and moon and pink velvet cushions and a Pekingese; and I hope they conveyed to her the fervor of that exuberant young man.

Of all those who drifted in and out hour by hour, day by day, month by month, I liked best the business men whom the shop took softly by the shoulder and walked away with. They would come in with "haste looking from their eye" and that manner of having just five minutes before catching a train to Pittsburgh and of being used only to push a row of buttons to send messenger boys

scurrying and stenographers ticking off letters. They wanted to be waited on by the watch and have their change on the wings of mercury and their books wrapped while they picked up their canes. Then the shop would slowly take them in its quiet hands and as I glanced over at them absorbed and forgetful of courts, coupons, and directors' meetings, their nerves slackened down, taken over by some eternal pursuit of truth, I always thought that the shop was what I had planned.

There is a clearly marked type of young matron of the city. They all have the same handwriting, the same smile with which they hold up the traffic police, the same nervous forced-up finesse and elegant slim crystal loveliness. And they have the same way of saying wonderful. They are submerged by wealth and ease-muffled in it. They seem to have done nothing but feel, and never acted within a feeling—a life of looking at cathedrals, thrilling to the Fifth Symphony. Granville Barker has put one in a play. But their men are worse, though more stiffened by work, because they are healthier; and more the determining factors of large issues. One is struck by the more fixed look of men. It was with this constituency of the public that I came to feel that the shop did its work. We never really reached working people. We tried every way we could devise. The Rand School Book Store with its slogan, "Workers, educate yourselves," does it with a cer-

tain element of the humbler salariat at any rate. Everything important we had went into the working class movement indirectly through the offices of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Bureau of Industrial Research, and certain men and women in the world of labor. We sent a woman in Japan anything with which we came into touch on labor all over the world. Once a young fellow working in the shipyards ordered an expensive book on shipbuilding. It had to be brought from England. I sent him a card one Friday afternoon that it had come and the next afternoon he came for it. Saturday afternoon being off at the yards he was taking a nap when the card came. His mother brought it up to him and said, "John, the book's come." *The* book! So he came for it. He stayed all afternoon turning over the glazed plates and explaining them to me—a hot summer Saturday afternoon when New York is empty as a graveyard. I suggested that he ought not to have to buy such an expensive book alone—that a group of men in the yard should buy it together, but he said no, he had the money now, and he wanted it for his own.

Once we had a letter from a woman who said that she was going into her new home in the spring and she had been "thinking a good deal about asking us to select two hundred dollars' worth of books for her library." She said that she didn't think she had good ability in selecting a large number of books.

Her husband was "a wide-awake, active workman in his trade, a machinist, and she wanted reliable, dependable books for him to read and reread—nothing cheap—she would rather have a few of the best."

But it became clearer and clearer that it was what Hobson calls "the spiritual reactionary" that we could most reach—men with power and accustomed to think, the intellectual *élite,* but obstructive to social change. My quarrel with ideas is that they always go to those who have them before, but these men read many a book that they would never have read if we had not set up a shop.

I expect an extra ray in my crown if there are crowns, for all the lawyers, bankers, and members of the stock exchange whom I have set free in the airy world of the far too taciturn James Stephens.

About a week before Christmas the first year, I was conscious as I fled before the storm that a woman with as bright a red hat as I have ever seen and very observant bright eyes had established herself on the settle by the window. She seemed to be only looking about and listening with a manner of well-accustomed self-possession. Before she went away she asked me to set a day when she could come to see me about something important. It was important. She wanted us to help her make a soul. She talked fast, vivaciously, with a sudden sweet *esprit* like an exciting bonbon. It was plain

that she was the sort of woman, like one of the English heroines, who could make even a home pleasant. Her father had been president of one of the big international steamship lines. She had gone abroad seventeen times before she was married. She was the product of finishing schools. She had been finished three times. Her husband was a doctor. He was successful. She liked him. She had a little son ten years old. She was perfectly happy. But a few years before she had begun to write stories. She could write a story any time in a week for which *Munsey's* or *The Smart Set* would pay her $100. People invited her to dinner parties, she said, because she could always keep things going. She could keep a story going in the same way. She did not need money. She was interested in people. Something was wrong with her stories. She suggested to me inquiringly that perhaps it was not enough to keep people going. Mr. Bob Davis, of *Munsey's,* had told her that she was the nicest little bungalow with nothing in it that he knew anything about. Her stories had not, as she expressed it in purest English, "any guts in them." Perhaps books—what did I think? She had once tried to read one of the lists of one hundred best books but she stopped at Froissart and could not get on any farther. She would read anything that we told her for a year, she said, if we thought it would work. I thought it would.

It was one of the excitements of the next year. The great shudder was of course to get books that she would enjoy. Within six months she had had a story accepted by *McClure's,* and she apparently regarded the cure as complete.

I have a romantic practise, assaulted by disasters enough to have impaired a less vigorous and native trait, of attaching settings and plots and conclusions to people from Heaven knows where, and so building every one into a hazy novelette. A man used to appear every six or eight weeks quite regularly, an ascetic, mysterious person with keys to unlock things, I took him to be, and with a gentle air. He wore his hair long and looked Scandinavian. I do not know just why or when I made him a Swedenborgian minister. He always bought interesting things—Greek texts, the less read work of William Morris; and when we did not have what he wanted, he asked us to order it, and a long-legged, rosy young girl with long straight braids came for it. His niece, I thought. I decided that he lived with his sister—a spare Swedish woman with a cool bright face, serious not cold, and eyes like clear glass, very erect, and with a small hat like a Zorn portrait of a lady I had once seen at a Swedish exhibition. I used to try to interest him in economics. The clergy should be informed on these things, I thought, and he was an especially remote clergyman. I plied him from time to time

with important importations. I even once tried to get him to begin with *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. I explained to him what a brilliant port of entry it is to social consciousness. But it became clear that if he was ever to be interested in sociology and economics, he would not be interested in them by me. He listened gently and attentively to all I said and melted like a snow drop through the door. One day he ordered a volume of Latin hymns.

"I shall have to take your name because we will order this expressly for you," I told him. "We should not have an audience for such a book as this again in a long time, I am afraid."

"My name is Thorstein Veblen," he breathed rather than said.

CHAPTER X

THE character of the shop, its peculiar nature and way of addressing itself to its world, slowly took form. There was "power of the wing" in it, I think, but more than anything else, it seemed to me, its visitors must have found in it reverence. We were willing to take a look at anything.

"To receive what is communicated just as it is communicated is culture." Goethe has said it, and that was to us the modern civilized way to think. And especially what is new and unknown it is so necessary to look at, because it may be the future. Our spirit was not so much revolutionary, I think, as adventurous and in the most exact sense of that fine word, realistic.

"The truth! It is the truth seek we."

People used to warn us that we would ruin our shop with our "principles." They were not startling ones but we were accused of everything. It was easy during the early days of the war to accuse anybody of being pro-German who regretted Gerard's book and believed that none of the great revolutions ever came by fighting. A silly school teacher—what Clarence Day calls a white rabbit

person—even put the government to the expense of opening our mail for two weeks. We often heard that we were the most dangerous headquarters of socialist ideas in the country and a center of dangerous British propaganda. There is nothing more wildly romantic than being dangerous, and we bore ourselves proudly after these reports came in and tried to look like Maud Gonne. A spy on the Sinn Fein after the Irish revolution stayed for an hour one evening, when I was engaged in the innocent sport of trying to make the accounts balance, and painted a picture so horrible of Padraic Colum, tarred and feathered and even with a pistol pressed to each of his temples, as sent me flying to the telephone when he was gone.

When the shop opened we began to sell Forel. We believed that everybody ought to read Forel and then stop fussing. During the summer Mr. Rebman, the publisher, was taken into Court by the Society for the Suppression of Vice for publishing the two dollar and a half edition. People who can buy a $5.00 book should read Forel, but people who buy a $2.50 one should not. We had a bad half-hour when Mr. Rebman came in to tell us that he was indicted. We were then three weeks old. A twenty-five hundred dollar lawsuit and weeks of preparation, attendance in Court, and crude publicity, would have been suicidal to us in those breathless first weeks. We went out to luncheon, talked

it over, washed our faces, and decided that as long as it was available, we would sell Forel. The next day Miss Alice Lewisohn came in and told us that if we needed a lawyer she would send us one. For weeks when anyone bought Forel I expected to see a special deputy's badge flashed into my eyes from under a lapel, but it never was. When Mr. Rebman asked me to testify for him as a witness, I accepted with all the alacrity of the heroine asked to step forward and receive a necklace in a box, only to wait for six hours in the anteroom of the Star Chamber and be told that the case had been thrown out on its merits.

Neither of us was suspicious about books nor asked them to keep within codes of good and evil. Like the Greeks, we preferred to think of knowledge and ignorance. Anything that is worth reading I can wrap a wet towel around my head and read. I even read a third, and jumped through the rest, of one of the best examples of edition *de luxe* French prurience, printed to sell as booksellers say "under the table." Its publisher insisted that I could hardly know what style is unless I had read it, and I want to know what style is. I stopped not because I was shocked—D. H. Lawrence can shock me—but because I was not being paid for my time, and there are, as one of our young assistants once said disconsolately, "so many books." I fought Dreiser's battles long before he became the

figure of American letters, not because I like his philosophy or his method, but because his seems to me honest work with a lick of genius in it. He is one of the three or four people I have known in my life with something in them great and mysterious. His philosophy is a chemical philosophy; he can not make much out of life except the attraction of atoms. The miracle is to decide what is significant and he cannot; and it is like swimming under grey water to me to read *The Genius.* But life is strong and eager in him. He knows the greatness of existence. He is a great eye turning this way and that, an eagle being.

"No, life is beautiful and interesting," he said to me once, "but it is not good." No, it is not good nor bad. It is unknown and outside what we can yet chart, but the history of our finding truth seems to be that there is always some logic that precedes experience.

Any book which was honest work we read and honored and sold. Our function was to pass on what had been nobly created, to see that it circulated, instead of lying lost in a dust heap to keep the wind away. It was to make talent a common thing passing quickly through every hand that we were there.

And so we came some very bad croppers. About three weeks before Christmas the first year a very complete-looking woman came in. She looked ar-

ranged—her hair, her veil, the lace collar, and ruffles—even her expression gave one the impression of having been arranged, and there was a faint smell of perfumed soap. Her gloves fitted as if she had been melted and poured into them; but where, one conjectured, would anything be found hot enough to melt her? She had a long Christmas list. It was a perfect technical exploit. Each name and address was written in an impeccable hand, the number of books to go to each address added with notes, such as "serious," "travel," "humorous," and slipped in an adjacent space left open for it, her card in an envelope with the name and address repeated. I could see, as if I entered it, the kind of mahogany, Dutch brass, and glazed chintz drawing-room in which she had composed it all, and the spinet at which at her funeral she would sit up and point and remark a little sharply perhaps that it needed dusting. I knew that she was very correct —a sheet of wrapping paper would have seen that and folded itself by the edge. I meant to take account of her probable prohibitions and aversions. But bookselling is a frenzy when it gets a man. And she was so responsive. One friend had nursed a sickly mother for ten years. She was now in California with a maiden aunt. She liked Stevenson and had a smile still sweet like crocuses in snow. I may have added the smile. At any rate I suggested *The Crock of Gold,* then still the property

of the epicure. I must have made it so enchanting an experience to read *The Crock of Gold* that no one could forego it. I think it to be so. What! alive in 1917 and have not read *The Crock of Gold!* She took one to read aloud to her husband.

She came in the day before Christmas to tell us what they thought about it. Henry James tells us that you cannot know a lady from one who is not until you quarrel with her. She quarreled like a lady. Her eyelids reddened a little as she spoke, but otherwise she was irreproachable. She was perfectly definite, brief, and withering. She said that her husband was a physician and a man of the world and he said that he would not give such a book as that to a dog. On page 219, I think it was, they had found a word they especially did not like. She wished to countermand all her order if possible and if it had already been sent to the friend who had nursed her mother and was living with a maiden aunt, she wished me to write and assume the entire onus of *The Crock of Gold.* The room fell silent before that frosty figure. I burned candles to the saints as I asked her where she found books without words that she disliked, and told her that her order had long gone, but that I would willingly write her friend my personal justification of *The Crock of Gold.* She said that she hoped I would do so, and she not so much went as withdrew. I hope her friend had read *The Crock of Gold* before she

received my letter. If not, I think she read it afterward.

We had one customer of whom I sometimes think and wonder if he is dead, or riding across a great veldt, or perhaps making a speech on American markets in the African House of Parliament. I have very little impression of his personality. I remember him rather as an "embodied situation," like Hamlet in the play. I found him one summer morning when I went in, standing in uniform against the bookcases. He was erect and elegant, rather small, brown, lean, and slim, with the look of the British empire builder, about thirty years old. I cannot tell a gas inspector from a captain of artillery, but he told me afterward that he was the latter. The English brass and covert were at their zenith upon him.

It was a busy morning. He stayed all morning leaning against the bookcases and turning over one book after another. After a time he stretched himself in a big willow chair. I was vaguely conscious of him sometimes. He impressed me as not caring very passionately for books, rather as if they were part of his customary setting and equipment and he knew how to make them fill an interval. About one o'clock he brought over to the writing table three or four books that he had selected and we talked about them a little. It was soon after the close of the war and after a while he began to talk

about it—suddenly, as the men always seemed to talk about it who came back. He said that he had been in command of a machine gun nest on the crest of a hill and he had watched a row of Germans come over the edge of a ridge below and would mow them down in a clean line as he swung the nose of his gun to the right, and then another line would come over and he would swing the gun back to the left and mow them down, and so on through a summer's day. He stayed on. There was something in his complete perfect bearing that made you pause, something arresting, an extreme lassitude, as if beneath that which keeps us upright and moving there was a break. I had really been watching him all morning, I found.

I had an appointment at four and at half-past two I said:

"I am sorry. I shall have to go out to luncheon and I will leave you with our young secretary. I must be back for an engagement."

"Would you care to be very decent to me and take luncheon with me?" he said.

I hesitated and then said, "Why, I think so." And we went.

He and his two brothers had a ranch in West Africa, and he told me about it at luncheon—the kraal, the kaffirs, the women and babies, the cattle, the sunlight, the music, and his life riding from end to end of the property. He told about his

people in England and the way he and his brothers had enlisted and gone at once in that startling August of 1914. And when I asked him what he was doing in America he told me about that. The British government had sent him to look into the peach culture in the States. They were going into it in Africa. He was to gather material for lectures. It was light pleasant work. They thought he might like a chance to move around. They gave him about ten months to live. His lip curled a little as he said it, as if the "president of the immortals" did not make sport of him unobserved. I asked him if he minded and he said, "Not much." He had been lonely. Nothing had quite worked out; he had had only two men friends—he hesitated a little over women, but after a while he cleansed his bosom of that too. They had never made good.

He went back with me and stayed all afternoon stretched out in a chair in a spot of sunshine in the window, or idling along the shelves and listening to various people who came in. He asked me if I would not take dinner with him. A city is strange in summer, especially at week-ends. All that is brilliant and molten in a city leaves it and relaxes, and she tears away the veils that hang between you. Ghosts come out and walk with you in a city in the summer. The day and night before had been too much for him in the quiet family hotel in the

middle of the block, rather deserted now in August. Horror was on him. After I had closed my books we went out to dinner. I hardly knew what to do. He was alone in a city where he did not know a person. He had turned into a bookshop that he had noticed the night before, because books are mighty life-giving things—even to let them fall open in your hand and lie idle there steadies you. And now he asked me a very simple thing—not to leave him. We did not deal fully in words—the British public schools had looked after that; and I tried to say to myself that I was a habitual dramatist who let myself in for all kinds of mirages. But I knew as I sat looking at him with his dropped head, fingering his celery and staring at his cigarette point, that it would be easier for him that night to press a Browning against his temple and "explore the shadow and the dust" than anybody opposite whom I had ever sat before. There come times when all the usual things that keep one making the usual gestures do not matter one way or the other. I could not think of a single friend in town that would do. It was the season when my partner and I took alternate half-weeks in the country. But it was all very simple and clear, as if we were in a searchlight, alone in a boundless and utter dark and a door were slowly opening somewhere in it.

He ordered a bottle of Burgundy and I felt a relief when he drank a little too much of it, as if

the searchlight had shifted a little. When we came out of the hotel we turned down the Avenue and walked to Madison Square. I tried to amuse him, to do my best, and he laughed and scanned me gratefully. He said as we walked aimlessly across the square that he was very tired. He hesitated. He had not been in bed for two nights, he said. He asked me if I would be willing to sit down on one of the benches a while. As soon as we sat down, he laid his head on his arm on the back of the bench and fell asleep so suddenly that it was terrifying. I have never seen such exhaustion before. The Burgundy had just blurred the edge off his nerves.

We sat there until three o'clock. He wakened several times and asked me if I minded, and then he fell asleep again, or at any rate he did not speak. The moon came out brighter and brighter in the sky. The thousand windows of the Metropolitan building went out. The great masses of shadow on the grass and walks opened and closed before me with the wind. The world seemed after a while nothing but shadows and light. A policeman scouted about us for a while, but I waved him away and he went. A uniform was still something to conjure with. I could think of certain people I hoped would not pass. The air grew more and more delicious, then chilled into iron, and then as a beautiful color spreads in water the summer dawn began

to beat in it. When he wakened, my young Englishman put me into a taxi still on guard at the stand on the Avenue. He did not say anything except that his sleep had put him in the pink. He wrung my hand and walked away with his set-up, swinging stride without another word. I was called away unexpectedly by illness the next morning and I did not see him again, but my partner wrote that he came in every day of the two weeks he was in New York and that he was a nice boy. Such is a bookshop.

CHAPTER XI

WE moved the fall of the fourth year. Our whole existence changed and swept into a smoother, more spacious prospect. Even the sky line changed. The great planes of the Biltmore at which we looked were as different from the broken up façade of the small-fry merchandising on Thirty-First Street as stability from competition. We had a bookkeeper. We had desks and two telephones. We had hunted our new shop as if we were an institution of the ages, and taken a lease for ten years. We reasoned that whatever New York did in ten years, it could not move away from the Grand Central Station. The great incident of our moving was that we discovered in the end of our stock room a cache of various things which had probably once belonged to the Surgical Dressings Committee. The Surgical Dressings Committee was long since defunct, and we appropriated without misgiving the two first desks we ever had, very large and exciting, piles of lumber which built our additional bookcases, and enough bandages of every width to equip us all with emergency supplies for two generations. I remember

riding up Fifth Avenue with the lumber sticking far out behind the car because it would not go on a van, and turning the corner of Forty-Fourth Street, through the cooperation of the traffic policeman, without breaking in the window of a single bank. We were on the south side of our fate that fall, and all very happy. We had a great many heavy cleansing rains that autumn which washed the city into youth and beauty and made our street very handsome for the young Prince of Wales to dash into from the Grand Central. But I never felt toward the new shop as I had toward the old. With all the glorious color we could paint it, it was difficult to keep it from looking like Himebaugh and Browne's or the Himalayas. We could hang it with interesting lacquers, and assure ourselves that the traffic count was three times what it was on Thirty-First Street, and that we could hit ten clubs with stones if we wanted to hit clubs with stones, and four hotels—to live is to change and I know that—but I only shook down into it and regarded it as a place where certain things happened.

One night I realized about seven o'clock that I had no key. Somebody had lost a key. In the emergencies of a complicated society, I had been left alone with no means of locking up. Such a thought falls into one's mind like a spear. I was showing a very solid-looking man a book on the

British Cooperative Movement when I remembered suddenly, as I turned a page, that I had no key. I reviewed in my mind hastily the fact that all the locksmiths would be closed and asked him what I could do. He seemed to find it a situation not outside his experience. All my faith in the impeccability of important businessmen vanished in the shop. They sent out checks unsigned; they squared their accounts by all sorts of large evasive items like "unrecorded expenditures." It was plain now that they lost their keys. He suggested with ready fluency as if he knew exactly the procedure, that the officer on the beat would, if I spoke to him, keep an eye on the door overnight. I consulted the traffic policeman about how the man on the beat could be found. He said that if I would go over to the Avenue and push a button in the lamp post on the corner, my man would get the signal wherever he was. It was a delicious autumn night, the sky of lilac silk. I found the button and began to push it absently, thinking of what made Turner different from Cézanne. I do not know how long I stood there. The street was empty. Some noise made me turn. To my horror I saw that a crowd of some two or three hundred messenger boys, late clerks, and strollers from the hotels, had gathered behind me and were watching me as I thumbed my button. The traffic policeman had not explained to me that with every push

I would flash a green and red light up the Avenue. I could not explain to this mass meeting that I had lost a key, but I wavered and a small boy said, "Ma'am, if you take down the receiver in the box and call the police department, they'll send you somebody."

My audience held its breath to find out whether the emergency was murder, fire, or sudden death, but I disappointed them. I asked that the officer on the beat be sent to 51 East Forty-Fourth Street, hung up the receiver, and started briskly away. But it was not so easy. Part of the three hundred trailed behind as I hurried back with what face I could. They stood long peering in the windows at a quiet woman adding up a line of figures and a cousin reading a book. In half an hour two plain-clothes men arrived, rather severe when they found it was only a key, but they took on the shop for the night and sent us to dinner.

We began the shop almost by sitting down in a room with a few books and selling them the next day. Month by month, as if a building rose before our eyes, we evolved an organization. My brother once said to me that he never felt that his office was well established until he had eliminated himself. Until he could read his morning mail and then put his heels on his desk and peruse the sparkling pages of the ubiquitous *Saturday Evening Post*, he knew that he had a weak spot by which a cold

in the head might lose a contract. We learned by doing things how to do them. Oh, what we learned! Bookselling is drowned in detail. When we had muddled along at anything in the amateur way a certain length of time, we always found an expedient by which brains could simplify it. Every day there come into any bookshop from fifteen to fifty publishers' invoices. When the big fall orders were on, these invoices were sometimes eight or ten pages long. Packages of books had to be checked against these invoices, the discounts figured, and the bills totalled. Figuring the discounts was a trial of Hercules. We might be buying books at $1.10 apiece—at $1.25, $1.35, $1.50, $1.60, $1.75, $1.90, all the way up to $150. We might have bought the first at 10% discount; the next at 25%; the next at 30%, 33½%, 36%, 37%, 40%. We might have bought three or five or eight or twenty-five or even four hundred. The combinations oftenest recurring I would soon remember, and then I would not open packages again for weeks, and I would forget them all. I figured these discounts for three years, and then I thought of making a key. For a week we entered on a list every new combination that appeared. It was typed on two sides of a heavy cardboard with a handle. It was haste, interruption, and inexperience proof, and you could check an invoice, as Lou had it, while a cat could lick her ear.

Step by step we developed a mechanism which bore an increasing weight. When we moved to the Yale Club we acquired Brown. Brown was one of those genuises of system who would blue-slip or pink-slip a love letter according as the order was filled or unfilled, I suppose, and so simplify enormously the possibilities of waste or mistake. I have before me now a pile of closely-written typed pages entitled *"Brief Outline of System Inaugurated at The Sunwise Turn."* It consists of seventy-one headings beginning: "All goods received are immediately checked," etc. He was a little golden-haired man with white eyelashes and a curious way of closing one eyelid like a fan when he had formed a conclusion,—humorous, travelled, pervasive, warm, indefatigable, without respect for anything except experience and style, and even those he could not be said so much to respect as to admit their constant validity. He kept up a constant rain of correspondence and funny little presents on our desks. I do not know how the letters he sent out sometimes in lieu of business correspondence might impress an Englishman. I once heard him dictating the following to Cazenove, the London jobbers.

C. D. Cazenove and Sons:
Dear Sirs:—

Regarding our delay in paying your October bill, I must remind you that your practice of

> filling orders so many years after they are sent puts us to some expenditure of time and effort in selling the books when they come, as in most cases the original customers for the items in question, are deceased. Some, it is true, add a Cazenove codicil to their wills binding their heirs to accept such belated orders at their current value, and this custom accounts for our prompt remittance on August and September accounts, but in other cases, etc., etc.

One day he returned from Macmillan's where he had gone to settle a long-debated charge reappearing periodically in their monthly account. It would take two or three weeks to look that up, they had told him.

"But I do not believe I can stay two or three weeks," said Brown, and he had the receipted bill in his pocket.

Brown cast a cursory glance at our card catalogues and gave them a month to live. His primary grievance was that he had once given a card to a constant customer to change the address and when it was handed back to him he read: "Pursy old party, but pays promptly." We had realized from the first the assets of a card catalogue with very complete memoranda. Ours read as well as Margot Asquith's biography, but as the shop grew larger and it went more and more out of our hands, it was clear that it needed as much to be edited. I was once horrified to find a beautiful young thing

in white lawn whom we had set to addressing the yearly broadside, copying the full note. The one on top said:—"Hiram C. Burke, Editor, *Sing Sing Bulletin*, Ossining, N. Y.—Convict; murdered his mother." I had talked to him once when we took luncheon with Dr. Kirchwey at Sing Sing, thought we might some time want his address, and filed it for reference. You can never tell when you may want a man who has murdered his mother.

When the card catalogue was purged of all its sins, Brown saved a few examples of the methods of an appassionata bookshop. There had been one lady who liked writing on cards who had insisted on giving us a large contribution from her visiting list and the note "Socially prominent" made quite a blaze. These are a few others:—

Hoyt, Helen. Poet. Good too.

Bacon, Aaron. Margaret's uncle. Has gobs.

Green, Brewster. Nice. Bad nose, but Bertie wants to model him anyway. Discriminating wife. Reads aloud. Anything bucolic, or explorations.

Carter, Isabel. Judge Hughes' granddaughter. Has a dog. Scotty. Fine library. Think she is going to be married too.

Le Mair, Caroline. Profile makes you wish you had lived a better life. First editions George Moore.

Hale, Beatrice Forbes Robertson. Author of book on feminism. God bless 'em.

Tuesdick, Leavitt Jr. Bought $189 at a first go-off. Nice world—what?

Brown reaped all the profits of the light we burned over the card catalogue in a single card. It had gone the rounds of the staff for comment with the others and returned with the following bouquet of evidence.

> First name wrong.
> Surname wrong.
> Bureau of Social Requirements out of business anyway. And besides this woman remarried 4 years ago. Her little girl played with Bumper and she lived next door to us and if anybody had asked me, I could have told you that she never even dusts a book.

This seems to prove that even the most dynamic card catalogue is a tomb of hopes.

There was one idea which we often tried to find a way to realize but we never could think it into a fact. Thinking is the hardest thing in the world. We both really believed that no one can ever do another man's work as well as he can do his own, and when you really believe a thing, it is a pity to do something else. We always wanted to make the shop cooperative within its own organization. There are so many things one never finds time to do because one is doing something else, and we never found time to study just the mechanism of the experiments that have been made in the cooperative movement—just how they did it. Ours was a simple machinery, but there never was a way

which seemed adequate for giving tentative Minnie, scouting to get married, and the Boy Scout stock room boys that came and went, a stake which would make the shop their property and give them the power to determine its policy.

CHAPTER XII

NOBODY knows much about bookselling. It is a trade in which there has been little constructive research. There is almost no concerted representative action in it. There are ten thousand sellers of books in the United States. The American Bookseller's Association has less than 1000 members, of which 30 per cent are publishers' salesmen.

The publishers know that their outlet is inadequate. I once heard Mr. Brainerd, of Harper's, point out that when a publisher spends two hundred thousand dollars in advertising a book, dozens of towns as large as Sandusky, Ohio, have no bookstore to sell it. Cities like Dubuque, Iowa, have only a department in a department store where much of the stock is very casual fiction.

There is, except in the small shops, practically no salesmanship of the professional stamp such as is presupposed in engineering, in insurance, in medicine and law, where a man sells you his judgment. What there is, is not aggressive. So far as I know, not a single bookshop in the country is going constructively after large markets in the way in which we found that they could be made. Not every-

body who comes in to buy a book is to buy a library. The cream of the trade is the small business. But I think the bookseller does not see his merchandise large enough, and that he must come to think of it in terms where a sale does not mean a book—his unit must be not a book, but a person, and then groups of people, whole species which will make a public of thousands, with all the interests, possibilities of delight, issues, ignorances and half-knowledge which make us the lame ducks that we are.

The selling of books is a *tabula rasa.* The highly paid positions in bookselling are all those of buyer. The advertising is comedy. The only advertising carried for two weeks in the *New York Times* by one of the largest bookstores in the world was this: "New and recent books." It would not sell books to Dr. Eliot. New York has in one of its bookstores a window decorator of unusual imagination. He never knows whether any especial one of his windows has pulled or not. It is hard to trace these things, he says. It is hard, but big intellectual enterprises do such things.

The mail-order market is unscratched. Once when I went into the shop I found a near-sighted old Jew in the finest broadcloth and satin nosing along the shelves. My partner said that she had spoken to him but he seemed to have his own plans. I might try him. After we had been talking a

while he, being a person who wants the best of you, said, "What is the genius behind this place anyway?" I explained to him all our idea of making thought accessible to people who are remote from the centers where it passes most current, as the Sears Roebuck Company makes it possible for the young thing in Traverse Bay or Cap a L'Aigle to wear the same kind of Norfolk suit as the girl on Broadway, and her mother to have the same kind of curtains, and her father the same tools. He said, "Yes, it is as big an idea as that." All that it needed is advertising, direct advertising, he said. He said that he had spent millions of dollars on advertising. When he went out he dropped his card on the table, and he was former president of Sears Roebuck.

The public remarks the fact that bookshops are few, ignorant, and ill equipped with what it wants. We have all told bookshop stories. What is the reason? Anything that the world wants as it wants ideas is ready for exploitation. I once heard a distinguished merchandising man say that the book public is the only public in America that is undersold.

We all know that our lives and work are what we make them. The weakness of bookselling is the impotence of the bookseller's imagination, feeling, and brains, in relation to his work. The publishers are selling titles. Each of them has a few.

The bookseller has the field for selling books. Nobody is selling the delights of reading, the power of books for peace, for delight, and for learning. The people who are actually selling books, not those who form a store's policy and buy its stock but who literally face the buyer, know so little and so seldom what books will do. And the pity is the greater because there is a great unremarked labor supply for bookselling, the like of which does not exist in any other transaction of business. I say this because we drew on it. The leisure-class woman wants to sell books. She will do it when she would not teach or work in any other business or profession. Women of breeding with a background of reading, perception, distinction, and brains, whose fathers are bankers, and their brothers physicians and editors, and even their husbands engineers, ask only shops which seem to them not too barren of all living grace and habitability to sell books as they ought to be sold. I could pick up 5000 women today east of the Mississippi who would do it without salary. We had from one to ten a week coming in to ask how they could open bookshops, or volunteering as our assistants. Eight small shops were opened in the last year in New York, six of them by women. Most of the creative efforts in bookselling today come from women. Marcella Burns Hahner, of Marshall Field's in Chicago, has carried through for two years a national book fair of signal

importance. She is probably the most conspicuous single figure in American bookselling today. Miss Bertha Mahoney has planned and managed for two seasons the Book Caravan. The idea of the Book Caravan has long been going up and down the bookselling world, but Miss Mahoney did it. Miss Marian Dodd, of the Hampshire Bookshop in Northampton, makes her cooperative bookstore pay seven per cent rebate to its buyers—how, I do not know.

Women are consumed by their fears. They want to keep near to something limited. They want to do a children's bookstore or have a salary. I have almost felt sometimes that if I saw anything a woman was afraid of I would urge her to go and do it. When earnest girls asked us if they should open bookshops, we always advised them to do it —find the capital if they did not have it, take the shivering plunge, meet the crises, and take the returns themselves if there were any. I advise every woman in the world to sell books. All the leagues of nations and peace parties and disarmament conferences are nothing compared to the right kind of small bookshops selling important books. "Only in the small group and in no other way has human progress ever been accomplished." Dr. Culan once said to us that there is no other single way of "becoming the most useful agency in the world

such as running a bookshop to disseminate the profounder values of the east."

Whatever accusation I may bring against the way we did what we dreamed, the fact remains that $200,000 worth of good books have been sold in the United States in the last five years that would not have been sold without our shop.

Publishers are crying for more brains and initiative in bookselling. They will support it wherever they see it. Only they will not hand you the critical three or four per cent on a lordly dish. You have to pass the dish and then they assent pleasantly. At the end of the first year in our own shop we canvassed our situation as honestly as we knew how to do. The report we made to ourselves was very professional. It had blue prints, overhead curves, requisition for direct advertising, requisition for press advertising, margin for experiments, etc., etc. We saw that there were two troubles in our experiment so far. We must widen our base, sell more books, and we must have a larger margin over the overhead if we were to declare a banker's profit. We made a plan. Our plan was to pick from each publisher's list the books on which we had seen that we were going to focus, try to get a better discount on those, and then focus on them. It had become plain that we were not going to sell all books, and in very many cases those which we did want to sell were those not on a publisher's

most active list, on which he was, therefore, glad to help us. Every morning through those autumn days I went to see a publisher. It was startling to find how ready they were. My contention was that we were doing something that the publishers wanted done, and they must help us to work out a way to do it. There was one publisher to whom I did not go because we had come to regard that firm as so difficult that it was hopeless. Another refused to consider our list. They said, "We never change our policy." It seemed extraordinary to think of an organization that never changed its policy. Aside from these two, everyone gave us what we asked.

We had a German bookkeeper then, a person with a terrible passion for complete routine, and those two outstanding publishers bothered him like an unconquered duchy. One noon he told me that he was going up to one of them about some mistakes in a bill; should he try what he could do about discounts? It was an absent moment. I said,—"Yes, suppose you do."

The next morning about half an hour after I arrived, the vice-president of Macmillan's called me up. He said that he was sorry, he had just heard that a certain bookbuyer had been shown by us the discounts he had made me; he had understood that the arrangement was to be entirely confidential. He was sorry, but he would have to withdraw from the arrangement. I begged him to

withhold his decision until I could see what had happened; we had been scrupulous. It was always possible, of course, that invoices might be shown by his own employees as well as ours. I hung up the receiver and interviewed our bookkeeper. It was true. He had taken a sheaf of convincing invoices along to fortify his argument and displayed them as exhibits without a misgiving. Within an hour I had calls from three publishers. In the morning mail there were four letters with the same news. How a story could have gone around so quickly I have always marvelled. The publisher to whom our man had gone was a bookseller as well as a publisher, and he had apparently made it his business to see that the story was disseminated. I took the rest of the morning calling up the men who had helped us and explaining to them what had happened. I have always remembered Mr. Macrae of Dutton's. He said, "I made that arrangement with you, because I thought it was a good one. I still think so. I can run my own business. Go on selling books, and do not worry. Merry Christmas. Good morning."

Behind the face of incompetence in bookselling there is a curious decrepitude, a play of economic determinism of which the public is not aware. It is all so curious. You have to be well within the situation to accept it. The average discount to booksellers from publishers is one-third. The Board

of Trade of the American Booksellers' Association assembled figures from 25 retailers in good standing all over the country which showed that the average of overhead for bookselling was one-third. We never could get it below .326. There are the big orders on which one gets 40%, but there is a whole realm of books on which the discount is 10%, 15%, 25%, which drag it down with terrible certainty,—what publishers call their educational list, importations, books of science—horrible tomb of how many of my hopes! Frazer's *Golden Bough* is an importation; Dewey's *Democracy and Education* is on the educational list. How many times my blood has hissed over these two phrases. People rail over the important books they do not find on the shelves of their bookshops. They do not find them because a bookseller loses 15% to 25% on every one he sells. We kept some things which we felt to be valuable and charged frankly an excess charge on them; but we sold many on which we added no excess charge which did not pay for themselves. A severe young expert accountant once confronted us with the figures that the actual outlay of money in selling one "pick up" order of one book—a pick up is an order from the publisher of a single book not in stock—was 16¢, including sale-slip in triplicate, and order slip in duplicate, stamp, envelope, publisher's invoice entered, posting, billing, etc. A "pick up" is a pocketful of the Christian

virtues for everybody concerned in it. The buyer feels so noble when he is willing to wait and says "You may order it." The bookseller feels so noble because he makes nothing from it. The publisher feels noble because he makes nothing from it either.

So you survive at bookselling by selling something else—kodaks, linoleum, lilac note paper, even automobiles. You may sell old and rare books. Profits are always large on collector's items. But none of these things is democracy. Democracy is great ideas universally held. The large bookshops which carry other things pay a net profit of 5%. The cruel strain and devotion that goes into the small expert shops belongs peculiarly to the tribe of ardent beings who administer them. I could almost pick the owners on the streets. They look so happy, so sleepless, so overworked. "For gold, it is not sold." I often think as I look about at conventions that all booksellers are quixotic. They must be. Every bookseller is dying for his country.

Publishers explain the discount situation, but they cannot explain away the cutting of their own throats. Bookselling has been penalized to the point where there are not booksellers to sell books. The older and more infirm houses disguise even from themselves the anomaly of the case. A publisher speaking at the Authors' League last winter said that a certain novel which sold at $2.00 yielded the author $1500 on 5000 copies, the bookseller $4000, and

the publisher a net loss of $181. In the case of the publisher he quoted the net loss; in the case of the bookseller the gross profit. The profit to the bookseller on every $2.00 novel he sells is not $.80; it is, if he sells visiting cards and wedding invitations, or pictures, textiles, tjantings, honey, marionette shows, and his advice on interior decorating, as we did, $.10.

Last winter Stewart & Kidd, of Cincinnati, made a canvas before publication for Lansing's book. Some days before publication date they had taken 500 orders and they filled their window with the books wrapped, the addresses so shown that one might read whether his next-door neighbor or his lawyer or the teller at the bank had ordered before him. Five hundred is a large sale of a single title of this kind. It means initiative, a hill of correspondence, telephoning. It was an interesting window. The profits on this sale were $75.

It is impossible to be a bookseller unless you take the work for the wages. But something is happening. You feel it like a change in the weather. Different ages carry on their progress by different measures. Ours is to be accomplished, as Robinson points out, "by honestly and courageously facing the extreme abundance of new intellectual material with which this generation has to deal. It is clear that we shall need more mind than ever before and that we can have indefinitely more mind than

we already have, if we but honestly desire it and avail ourselves of resources already at hand." It seems to me that this will now be done through that agency of interchange we call a bookshop.

Small bookshops have sprung up everywhere in these last few years. They clamour and think and twist and find more capital somehow. All the more alert publishers have increased their discounts. The American Booksellers' Association will probably have within a few years a membership of 1500. There is the Women's National Book Association which is trying to draw into a single working body all women identified with the making and distributing of books—writers, binders, printers, employees of the publishing houses, librarians, critics, like the French syndicate unions. But more than all else there is feeling, a meaning, something obscure, unwatched, unnoticed, and yet there—some time to be an old wives' tale. It is one of the times when something happens.

Perhaps bookshops are the next step for the education of maturity—after the medieval university and the public library. Lenarcharsky, the minister of education in Russia, regards them as more important than public schools. He has seeded Russia with them. Perhaps they are great public utilities and will be given grants of public aid. Perhaps they will be subsidized, like a merchant marine; or there will be great bookselling foundations. But

we must first try whether they cannot be in the Anglo-Saxon way a going concern.

"War! War! No Peace."

First the rules of the game must be brought up to date, and we must incubate a great attitude, a vast wish like that which precedes all migrations of the race.

One does so many things in a life. What is the value and destiny of such pieces of work as this? Each of them leaves something perhaps which builds the wall against infinity, the infinity of what we are not able to live. Some one will carry on our gay bookshop strangely, in unseen ways. And you can not take such work as this up with a forceps and look at it, and ask it, "Are you complete and as I said you would be?"

Life is like that. You turn a key, but it is not ended, and you do not always understand what it has been. I try not to ask it to stay as it is. I try because it will not do it. Sometimes from a tree on a summer afternoon, from the high sky and wind and bees, little by little something has passed to me which was more than a hope or an apple, or the sky, or a story with a plot, or a child, or any other single perfect thing. We see the world at times not as shaped little pieces or shaped big pieces, neither hot nor cold, good nor

bad, purpose, nor even law. Only that is true which is from nature—the nature of the thing it comes from, and sometimes I have had a feeling of doing a thing very simply, as sunlight falls across a wall. Then it is pure and distinguished by its truth.

THE END

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